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MARSHAL NEY

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MARSHAL NEY

*From an Engraving by Tardieu after the Painting by Gerard*

# MARSHAL NEY

D. 33

by

PIERS COMPTON

*With Four Illustrations*



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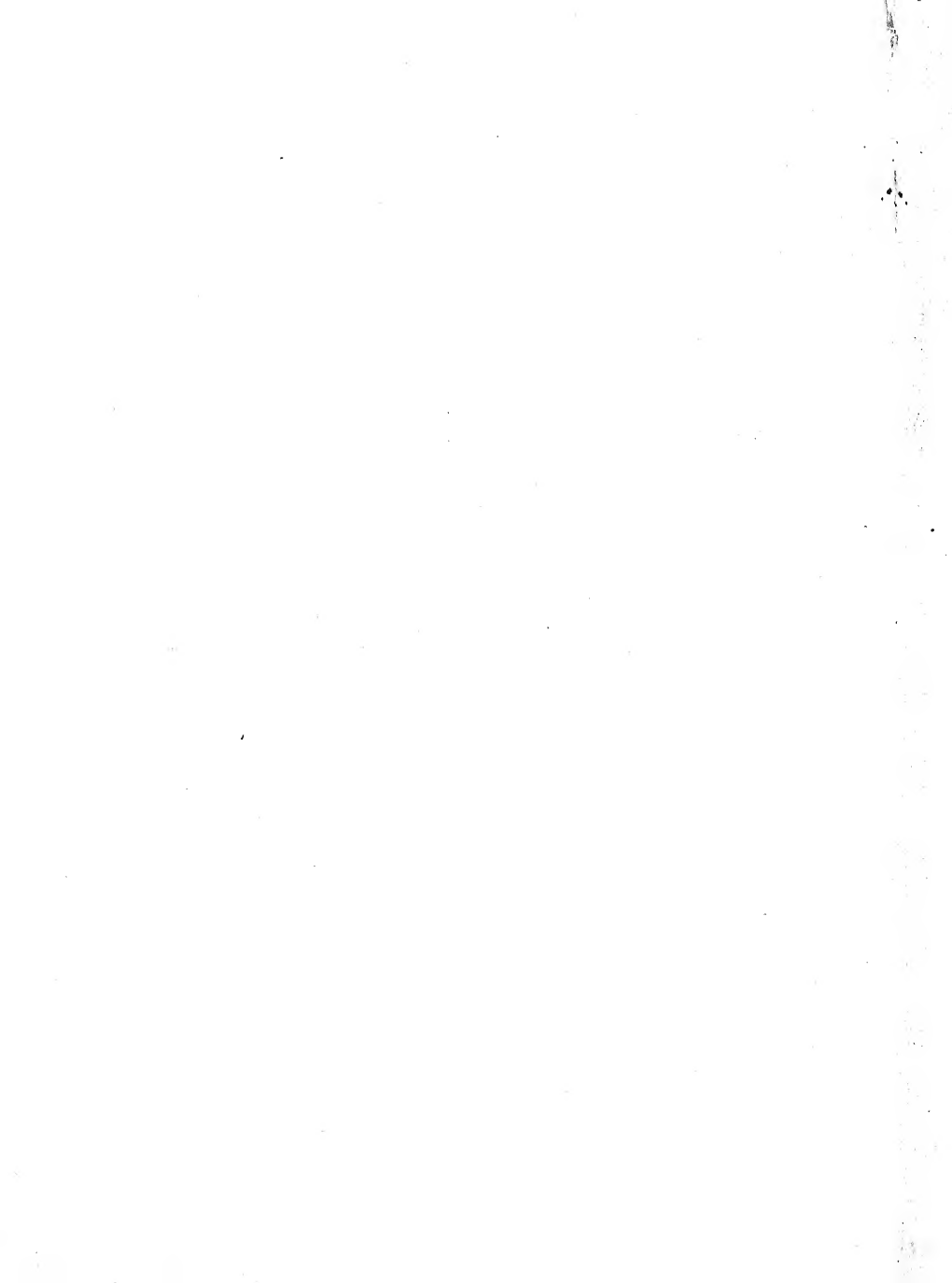
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## CHAPTER I

### THE ARMY

THE story of French arms is one of the world's epic romances. Even in such a time as the present, when the ancient glamour (but temporarily, perhaps) has departed from the whole trade of war, the legendary halo of the Grand Army may be found resting upon that much-fabled body, the Foreign Legion. And if, in a future of mechanical advancement, military display tends to become totally extinct, it would be quite in keeping with tradition for the last bugle to sound, and for the last uniform to parade, at the Arc de Triomphe.

For the Army is France, and France is the Army.

The background we have to consider in the life of a Napoleonic Marshal may be called a miracle of development, or transition. It was a deliberate and successful challenge to a military ordering established throughout Europe, but which nowhere else had reached the same heights of paralytic formalism as in France. For an appreciation of this together with the startling innovations that followed, we must turn back to glance for a moment at the French military system in the mid-eighteenth century, some years before the coming members of the aristocracy of the Gallic sword had found their cradles.

It is strange to reflect that armies were then unacquainted with the prime necessity of destroying an opponent. Everything was secondary to the movement, and the manner of its performance. There were long marches, countless manœuvres, endless sieges; and when the armies happened to come face to face the attack was invariably made in equal parallel lines, in perfect arrangement. The entire military art was confined to similarly narrow bounds, which ended by producing a



breed of commanders in whom the habit of cautious tactics overcame their natural bravery, however great. And when we add the prejudice and distinction of pre-Revolutionary France to such a stiffness it gives some impression of the mould in which the Royal Army, by the time of the Seven Years War, was set and hardened.

The general endeavour of troops on the battlefield was to remain in mass, to prevent the isolation of small bodies. This was normally effected by a three-rank formation of infantry, which allowed for alternate firing and loading, while in order to guard against an encircling move the infantry was formed into squares, or with its flanks resting against some likely obstruction, such as a river or group of buildings. It was a style requiring the most accurate and careful dispositions, especially when combined with a proper respect for the prevailing slow strategy of the time. And the Revolutionary triumph was the measure of its contempt for all such observances.

Again, only representatives of the highest and lowest grades went to the colours. The officers, by virtue of wealth or title, formed a separate class, which had its own special code of promotion. This mainly consisted of the ability to share the pastimes of a dissipated Court, or of treating Madame de Pompadour with exceptional courtesy. Favouritism and intrigue were the acknowledged rungs in the climb from subaltern to superior positions. So it was that the French fighting machine ran down, despite the able theories advanced by such reformers as Bourcet, Broglie, Guibert, Choiseul, du Teil, and Saint-Germain. There was no one to combine their suggestions into a new and practical system of force.

A typical instance of this deterioration occurred at Minden in 1759, when the French cavalry (which arm was then a decisive factor on the battlefield), was penetrated by the bayonets of the British foot. Voltaire, with a regretful sigh for the cool heads of the English, pointed his listeners back to the days of Crécy, Poitiers,

and Agincourt. Whilst even in the first flush of Republican enthusiasm an enemy boasted of his readiness to march through France with a regiment of Prussian Hussars, armed only with staves.

But what the old school lacked in discipline and ability was more than compensated for by the ease and luxury of its condition. The young Napoleon, on entering the Military School in Paris, was astonished to find that each cadet had a servant to groom his horse and polish his equipment. Actual command was vested in the non-commissioned officers, since the shadows of higher ranks but rarely fell upon the barrack wall or parade-ground. And these non-commissioned men, to whom Ney belonged, were the class which came to snatch the Imperial baton. From these sprang the Bayards and Crillons of the new theory.

That theory was hammered into shape on the anvil of Hanoverian, Habsburg, and Romanov hostility. The Europe outside France was unable to breathe the air of political privilege that wafted the Eagles and the tricolour. Hence the conscription of the sansculottes, the calling up of the carmagnole levies who went forward with passionate song and gesture, patched and leatherless, full of dogma and licence, preaching and looting, but moving like an armed wind to attack. And whoever has detected the more passionate timbre of French bugles, and the swifter tempo of French columns on the march, has contact with the wild spirit of that immortal rabble.

Their very appearance was sufficient to inspire the ordinary French citizen with something of the sentiment that was to fill all Europe. For the roll of a Republican drum at the entrance to a town or village was a sign for the well-conditioned to bolt their doors against their defenders. So long as the merely extreme element had its way in shielding the frontier the volunteers were exposed to an additional peril in the shape of popular government; although a decree of the Constituent

Assembly to the effect that 'All citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally admissible to all dignities, places, and public employments, according to their capacity, and without other distinctions than those of their virtues and talents', marked a wholesome clearing away of old abuses. It was also responsible for some two-thirds of the regular officers emigrating or leaving the army. They disliked a procedure which has been called a substitution of the cult of *la patrie* for that of Royalty. A new system was adopted by the brigading together of pre-Revolutionary forces and volunteers, which meant that effective battalions were reduced from one thousand to six hundred. But the real source of weakness, which eventually led to the collapse of the early levies, was the dictatorial power of the extremists.

Every officer, liable to higher-class sympathies, was held in suspicion. There was trouble and confusion in the transfer of an order or carrying out of an operation; while soon it was considered that a man had only to be an out-and-out sansculotte in order to lead others. The raggedest form was the most likely receptacle of true authority. A list of the officers of one particular company may be cited as being typical of that vain, unlettered yet uplifted multitude. The captain was an ex-lawyer of over forty who was still waiting for his first brief at the time of being called to the Three Colours. The lieutenant, who had previously worked as a joiner, was regarded as a qualified tactician by the fact of his having lived near a barracks. While the sub-lieutenant was a village idiot who amused the ranks by wearing spectacles on the tip of his nose.

'I am afraid we shall cut a sorry figure in front of the enemy,' ventured one doubtful private.

'Be careful, citizen,' corrected his captain. 'Your words are seditious. Democrats can never be conquered.'

There was a depth of unconscious truth in therodomontade. 'The Genius and spirit which the Revolution

had awakened in individuals supplied the place of knowledge, order, and the old method of warfare,' says a pamphlet of the time. And again: 'When we see soldiers of uncouth appearance, without the smallest show of subordination, and in rags, we cannot but ask ourselves the question, how it has been possible that such an assemblage could have achieved military exploits of so distinguished a stamp?'

This lack of discipline, marked by so many observers, was an outward and casual sign of the Revolution in action. When duty required, a proper measure of obedience naturally cemented the army. But even this tradition of surface things continues, for French troops, halted by the roadside, have nowadays the appearance of quickly breaking formation or loosely covering.

Meanwhile the true army, the fighting force to embody the new principles of the Republic, was rising from and behind the brilliant yet transient energy that warded danger from the frontier. The Committee of Public Safety shaped it with the terrible ruthlessness of frenzied inspiration, acting on the maxim that hopeless audacity may succeed when the promise of glory fails. Every leader took the field with the undisguised alternative of gaining a chevron or a place on the guillotine. And the medicine was bitter, but effective.

'You will take Toulon, or you will deserve our reproaches,' the Committee wrote to Dugommier, who was conducting the siege. The captain in charge of a battery that was being constructed in front of Charleroi was given till six o'clock on the day following by which to complete the operation. Though extra men sweated at the work the battery was not ready to fire a shot at the specified time, whereupon the captain's head rolled in the basket. Hard going, beyond all doubt, especially as most of the unfortunates were matched against the impossible. But the year 1793 witnessed the virtual perfecting of the Revolutionary Army.

It was a source of perpetual astonishment to onlookers

who had been trained in the traditional school of arms. 'The French soldier,' continues the old pamphlet, 'whose relatives had been guillotined, shot, or drowned, or whose property had been confiscated, thought himself free because he could *thou* and *thee* his general, speak to him without taking off his hat, and sit occasionally at his table.' But such statements, however true in themselves, fail to account for the spirit of the men who imposed the Revolutionary theories, with varying success, upon the map of Europe.

Marmont described it as 'an atmosphere of light'. The same heady significance inspired the manner of Marceau's request for reinforcements on the field of Fleurus: 'Give me four battalions, or I will blow out my brains!' What would Villars, Luxembourg, or the gaffer-like generals of Central Europe, who were more fitted for arm-chairs in a modern club than for streaming bivouacs, have thought of this sublime hysteria? And it might be fairly condemned as being out of place on the battlefield—unless that field was ringing with the shouts of the Sambre-et-Meuse, and the dying exultation of a young race of paladins, in a springtime of ardour or illusion.

The material, purged by justice and tyranny, flame-like in conception and moving like a tempest, was ready to hand in the winter months of 1793. But so far the enemy had been swept up and carried before it with no prospect of consolidating a victory. And there the tide of new ideas would have been stayed, and eventually turned back as a formless, moon-dazed experiment, but for Napoleon.

Under that name the loosely knit threads of a Revolution in arms were converted into a definite pattern, and the saga of wild deeds became an imperishable epic that finds no counterpart in the annals of military vision. Europe was taken by surprise by a system that, in its earliest form, boasted no tactical complication, and won through by the vigour of successive attacks, brigade

following brigade, at a few given points. Packed columns took the place of the old widely strung lines, and a close concentration was observed where hitherto armies had been spread across leagues of country. The individual fire and dash of the French character were gathered into a microcosm. But over and above all was the new theory of marching.

Marshal Saxe had already observed that 'the whole secret of drill and war is in the legs', but no soldier, until the rise of Napoleon, staked his command on the validity of such a maxim. For such names as the Army of Italy and the Grand Army are so many movements in a symphony of express motion. The soldier who knew that no absurd privilege was blocking his way to advancement moved, as he fought, like a fury. They might run short of powder, or even muskets, and have to tighten their belts many times in the course of a campaign; yet the march continued. They might live, as being a young and truly inspired creation, from hand to mouth; yet nothing hindered their marching. Arms and bread were valuable necessities, but it was the vigour of covering roads that told in the long run. And now their bodies lie under the ways of Europe the spirit that animated them is still marching, wherever men speak of valour.

No victory, no matter how hardly won or decisive, was regarded as an excuse for resting. No extreme of weather, no matter how desperate it rendered their situation, obscured the fifteen or twenty miles of highway that were rolled up like a spent ribbon, to mathematical timing, between dawn and sundown. The wizard in the grey surtout had spread his maps, and crawling over them depicted the scheduled positions with coloured needles.

The great French commanders have invariably been fortunate in their Chiefs-of-Staff. Napoleon had his Berthier, Ney a Jomini, and Foch Weygand. And so, while the points and compasses disposed of the European

plane in the depths of a great travelling carriage, the men marched, grumbling at the inclemency of a dozen climates, or with their lips shut tight over a straw when they entered the dusty regions, to prevent dryness.

The general order for every day of the Napoleonic calendar was a short one, and easy enough to remember. It was that all troops, in the absence of more detailed instructions, were to march to the sound of the cannon; for where such thunder was, there would the game be also. Furthermore, it was held advisable for an army to misjudge its snap or pounce rather than keep a whole but uncertain front. The deadliest sin among the fourteen armies, whose original marching song had been the *Marseillaise*, was inaction. A general might blunder, but let him look to it that his intentions, at least, were dangerous to the enemy.

The effect that this whirlwind school of arms produced upon the model warriors of Europe may be summed up in the words of an Austrian officer, referring to Napoleon during the campaign of 1796: 'This young general is violating every rule of military operations. We never know where to find him. He may be in front of us, in our rear, or else on our flank. This way of making war is outrageous.'

These unorthodox methods, even when the Empire was at its height, represented the most consistent standpoint of the Revolution. For with the abolition of privilege, every soldier of the French Army became invested with a hitherto unknown dignity and independence. Napoleon had the happy manner of making every man, from drummer to Marshal, feel that his name was remembered, together with that of the field where he had gained a wound or decoration. It had been laid down in Paris that the French soldier was not a vagabond but 'a citizen placed under military law', which course, for a century after, might well have been adopted by England. It reacted favourably upon the

confidence of an army to believe that every franc in the treasury, and every button on the regimental coat, was numbered.

The rise of Michel Ney and his fellow Marshals resulted from Napoleon's attempt to secure his position, and that of his imagined dynasty, by reviving the traditional forms of honour. Since the Imperial crown could be supported only by swords, there was a certain diplomatic value in their being the swords of a Marshalate, which served as a revelation of brilliant talents and hardihood, shining valour and ridicule, jealousy and sacrifice, vainness and splendid endurance. And although it may be impressed upon us by their facility in lying and swearing, their frequent appearances decked out in top-heavy feathers, coloured boots, flaming stars, and extravagances of lace, that the light of the Marshals hailed from Gascony, nothing can erase the heroism with which they led a cloud of cavalry or a column of grenadiers. Michel Ney and his compeers of the sword belong to the rare order of beings who may yet be unfrocked without hurt to their reputation.

The story of the Marshalate assumes an epic significance from the first moment of its meridian. Over it loomed the shadow of irresistible calamity, which some may translate as being due to the errors of a prematurely aged Napoleon, the dissension among his commanders, the Spanish invasion, or the crossing of the Niemen under the June light of 1812. For no man defeated that prodigy of the Revolution in arms, which, once the scope and madness of its early inception was imparted to the veins of Europe, turned back upon its own exhausted spring-head. But it left behind the fever of an incalculable dream, a dream of unity, in aimless pursuit of which a breed of lesser men than the great Marshals are still meeting in council.

It ended in the grand manner of poetry, with the sadness of reminiscence and a last vague hope that yet outlived the crowning failure. It is true that the quarrels



of the Marshals became more intense as one by one their fantastic luminaries paled in the sky, and that Napoleon was over-ready for sleep even when the mouths of 'his beautiful daughters', the field guns, were speaking. But the end was accompanied by visions of '96, and earlier, when the young men who were to fashion great days were themselves moulded by the Republican theory, and the brief moment of youth was invincible and elusive as its dreaming.

Of the twenty-six batons that were carried in as many knapsacks, four belonged to members of the retired list who were rewarded for honourable association rather than actual talent. They were Kellermann, Pérignon, Sérurier, and Lefèbvre, who, with the exception of the last, may thus be passed over. Jourdan, Moncey, Brune, Grouchy, and Mortier were also mediocrities whose names were yet connected with the mad brave early days that saw the transformation of sansculottes into classic legions. The gallant Poniatowski owed his elevation to his Polish nationality, which was used by Napoleon as a lever against the Russians. But the backbone of the Marshalate, the sustainers of the Napoleonic venture, were Ney, Lannes, Murat, Davout, Berthier, Masséna, Soult, Macdonald, Bessières, Bernadotte, Marmont, Suchet, Oudinot, Victor, St. Cyr, and Augereau.

These men may be credited or charged with every human strength and weakness, save a drab indifference.

For a better understanding of Marshal Ney, and the spirit in which he warred, it is necessary to take a brief review of his principal comrades-in-arms. Between them they formed a brilliant school that finds no parallel except among the heroes of Agamemnon, the knights of Arthur, or the paladins of Charlemagne. They comprise the faith and mutability of an epoch that was born when the first human wave surged against the

Bastille in '89, and died when the last charge melted at Waterloo a quarter of a century later.

There is the gaudy figure of Murat, prince of Gascons and of cavalry leaders, whose long legs carried in their stride the breed of the stables, where he had once worked; a hot-mouthed exhibitor of flamboyant colours and waving plumes, who valued his good looks, in their carefully tended frame of chestnut curls, next to his unsurpassable bravery when riding at the head of sabres. In the early days, at Aboukir, he received a shot in the face, and worried over the possible consequence to his appearance. The same anxiety recurred when he fronted the Royalist firing squad at Pizzo with the request: 'Soldiers, do your duty. Fire at my heart, but spare my face.'

Lannes, who came of peasant farming stock, was also a Gascon, a small man with a great tongue, who often sat till midnight over his books and emerged, more or less educated, as the advance-guard leader of the Grand Army. He was the first to set foot on the bridge of Lodi; at Ratisbon he dashed forward and seized a ladder about which two storming parties had been annihilated; while he was known to leap from his bed in hospital to lead another irresistible onset. The testament of Lannes was contained in the words he spoke after Montebello: 'In my division you could hear the bones cracking like glass in a hailstorm.'

Masséna, whom Napoleon called the 'spoilt child of victory', had a picturesque career as cabin boy, non-commissioned officer, and smuggler, before establishing his fame as the defender of Zurich and Genoa. He was sensual and grasping, but appeared in a far finer role at Wagram, where, having injured his leg, he drove into action in a carriage made prominent by four white horses, with a doctor to change the dressing. While in Italy he and his men lived on a bread-like substance composed of rotten flour, sawdust, starch, oatmeal, linseed, sour nuts, cocoa, and hair powder, which was held together by wooden skewers.

Soult, who combined a chilly air of personal aloofness with a keen penetration and vigour, was the finest tactician in Europe, according to Napoleon. He was frightened of his wife, but answered an Austrian call to surrender by saying: 'With bayonets and men who know how to use them, one lacks nothing.'

Berthier, by his amazing power of translating even the thoughts of his leader into clear orders, his memory, and physical endurance, has become symbolic as the admirable Chief-of-Staff. He was once said to have passed thirteen unbroken days and nights in the saddle; but a greater proof of ability was when Napoleon attributed the loss of Waterloo to his absence.

Davout and Marmont represented the old aristocracy among the Marshals. The latter was a gunner and man of books, who almost equalled Berthier in physical toughness. For at Lodi he was thrown and overridden by a swarm of cavalry, but was able to stand erect when the last horseman had passed, apparently none the worse for his iron drumming; while at Castiglione he went without sleep for five days.

Davout lives by two sentences: 'It is the obstinate people who win'; and again: 'When a man has the honour to be a Frenchman, he must always be a Frenchman.' No breach of discipline or falling off from the given schedule escaped him, and he commanded with a rod of iron. His generalship survived an acid test in the battle of Auerstädt in 1806, while at Borodino he continued in the front of that most desperate field with blood pouring from a hideous wound in the pit of his stomach.

Augereau was a typical street arab who carried the speech and manners of the Paris gutter into the Marshalate. Before settling down as a soldier he had been a footman, a waiter, and a dancing-master. He was a first-rate swordsman, athlete, and seducer, with words enough to amplify even his forceful experiences. During one of his many quarrels Augereau leant forward,

unfastened his adversary's belt, and calmly poured a cup of hot coffee down the aperture of his breeches. When Napoleon made peace with the Catholic Church he was forced to attend Mass at Notre-Dame, where he got his own back by making sufficient noise to drown the celebrant. But he approached greatness at Castiglione, and again at Arcola, while the morning of Eylau found him with a fever that was not enough to prevent him going to the front on a sledge and then being strapped upright upon his horse. He was too unbalanced to bear dignities, however, and soon lost caste as a soldier.

St. Cyr, the enigma of the Grand Army, passed from his father's tannery to become engineer, actor, artist, and finally soldier, although the artist never left him. He was a bad companion, a supreme egotist who thought less of the individuals he commanded than of his beloved violin, which he took campaigning. The high noon of his soldiery was reached at the second battle of Biberach, as he frankly admitted: 'On that day I was a man'; and yet he neglected to wear epaulettes.

Oudinot, although a stern Republican, hated the Terrorists, and was once provoked into hurling a dish of beans at one of their orators. He shone at the head of the grenadiers, whom he loved because, as he explained, he led them all to death. His bivouac title was 'The Marshal of the thirty-four wounds', which he justified by appearing after Friedland with his coat shot literally into ribbons.

Bessières was a cavalry leader of the romantic school, with his handsome figure and the queue and powder which belonged to the past. He was strictly faithful, but rarer still in that his death was mourned by the terrible Guard. 'He lived like Bayard; he died like Turenne,' was Napoleon's verdict.

Suchet, a capable all-round soldier, was great in the art of reducing fortresses. Victor, who had once plied drumsticks, was a good fighter, drinker, and boon companion. He was given a trouncing by Napoleon

after a signal failure at Montereau, and ordered to leave the army. 'Victor has not forgotten his old occupation. I will shoulder my musket and take my place in the Guard,' he answered, and that saved him. Bernadotte was another Gascon, straight as a ramrod, with a mop of black hair, a prominent hawk-like nose, and dark eyes that pierced as far as treachery. But in the days of his early flawless leadership men called him the 'God of Armies'.

No list of this kind would be complete without mention of ex-Sergeant-Major Lefèbvre, a stern old Republican, blunt as a wooden sword, brainless enough to be reliable, but a hard marcher and a still harder fighter. His wife had washed and charred before marrying, but neither of the Lefèbvres troubled to keep it a secret. 'Don't be so proud of your ancestors,' he once admonished a young coxcomb; 'I am an ancestor myself'; while on the way to a review an officer asked whether his wife might accompany them. 'Go to hell!' responded the old camp-boy. 'We didn't come here to take your women for a drive.' Lefèbvre must have been a sight for the gods at Montereau, where he fought so furiously that foam came out of his mouth, like a horse.

These were the men of Ney's circle, with whom he lived and fought, camped and quarrelled, and whose occasional retreats he covered by the most brilliant rear-guard actions in history. To know the temper of his fellow commanders is sometimes equivalent to finding a new meaning in a deliberate move, or a battle. For we are dealing with men, the creatures of alternate mood and principle, which goes to explain why here we may find a corps spending itself against hopeless odds in one direction, then failing to give proper support in another. But, however petty their personal motives, every man regarded the line of march as a way of liberation.

The value of this crusading fervour, which was the very atmosphere of Ney's existence, was utilized to the full by Napoleon. It was the inspiration behind every one of his addresses to the army, which even the privates recognized as embodying the spirit of a time in which they had received the God-given faculty of preaching the Revolution. He virtually opened the gate of Italy with the well-known phrases: 'Soldiers, you are half starved and half naked. The Government owes you much, but cannot help you. Your patience and courage are honourable to you, but they procure you neither advantage nor glory. I am about to lead you into the most fertile valleys of the world. There you will find flourishing cities, and teeming provinces; there you will reap honour, glory, and riches. Soldiers of the Army of Italy, will you lack courage?' And again, under the shadow of the Pyramids, he comprised the sense of universal mission into a single line that waxed more insistent than any nostalgic longing for the boulevards: 'Soldiers, from those heights forty centuries are looking down upon you.'

The story of France abounds in chivalric utterances that remain as stable as its soil. Their repetition and conformity were the lexicon which soldiers like Ney learnt by heart, as something inherent to their genius. It was not essential for the old grumblers to know that such had been the accents of Clovis, Pepin, and Charlemagne. But it was a Roman legacy, and therefore native to the blood of that race of warriors who followed the great Marshals.

For the Army is France, and France is the Army.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MAN

THE year 1769 was prodigal of great soldiers. For on March 1st of that date, in the old town of Chartres, an upholsterer's daughter gave birth to an unwanted child who was destined to become Marceau, one of the finest swords of the Republic. The 29th witnessed the addition of a club-footed son to the family of a small notary in the Tarn, and the name of that family was Soult. On April 10th a farm-house in Lectoure, on a swell of the Pyrenees, was brightened by the advent of a fourth son: Jean Lannes. May Day in the room of a house overlooking Merrion Square, Dublin, found a woman in travail for the sake of Arthur Wellesley. While on August 15th, in the Corsican town of Ajaccio, a tapestry-covered couch was utilized for the entry of Napoleon.

But prior to any of these, on January 10th 1769, Michel Ney first saw the light in the small Rhine township of Saarlouis. Both by blood and tradition he inherited the instincts of a soldier, for his father was a veteran of the Seven Years War, who had finally settled down to the trade of a cooper. While Saarlouis, being in the department of Lorraine, was a link in the chain of fortresses which ran the length of the Franco-German frontier, that meeting-place of immemorial racial passions.

In general the people, with their alternate usage of French and German tongues, may be called a mixed race. But their culture was wholly French, and the purely Germanic element among them was in the minority. Lorraine nobly responded to the needs of the Revolution, and besides a numerous rank and file sent Marshals Ney, Oudinot, St. Cyr, and Victor to lead the Republican and afterwards Imperial columns.

In the low, old-fashioned home of Pierre and Margaret Ney three sons, of whom the future Marshal was the second, and a daughter were born. The latter, Marguerite, died in 1819, as Madame Monnier by her second marriage. The eldest son, Jean, met his death before the Austrian positions on the Trebbia, in 1799; while Jacques, the youngest, died in childhood.

Pierre Ney, like every old soldier, was loyal to the memory of his early calling, and between the whiles of tinkering at barrels he related stories of camp-life and battle to his family. But, he was always careful to imply, it was no profession for a young man who was born without title or influence. However talented or courageous, there was no promotion for one who came of the lower *bourgeoisie*. A man must make money if he wanted to go on living, hence the cooperage; and he spat with a sense of conviction that was wholly lost upon the impetuous Michel.

For his school-days, passed in an establishment kept by the friars of St. Augustine, were already giving evidence of a mind that heeded nothing of his father's counsel. He was a centre of disturbance, fiery in word and deed; yet, in spite of his age, it usually happened that some sort of real grievance could be detected as the cause of his outbreaks. But it was thought that all such turbulence had come to an end when he left school and entered the office of M. Valette, a local notary who had come to believe in the boy's future.

Like Ney's father, however, M. Valette identified that future with work at the desk, which seemed to bear promise when the young man was appointed clerk to the King's attorney. And for some time Ney was careful not to shock these hopes, although he had watched his brother Jean leave Saarlouis to become a soldier with no little envy. Of course Papa Ney had growled and said there was no money in the business. But neither was there any kick to be got out of criminal proceedings, and it was better to be hacked by a sword than dirtied by



a pen, any day of the week. At worst it would only release the spirit that he could often feel clamouring within him, while what freedom was to be had from the handling of deeds and affidavits?

A temporary change for the better occurred in 1784, when Ney turned his back upon the dusty realms of jurisprudence and went as overseer to the ore mines at Appenweiler. Two years later he accepted a similar post in the ironworks at Saleck, where he remained until the closing months of 1788, when he suddenly resigned. The forge and furnace had at first presented him with a new interest, such as the effects produced by the transmutation of ore into iron. While besides the promise of a responsible position in the near future there was noise and movement, which were not unwelcome accompaniments to his rising thought.

But the baton was already stirring in the visionary knapsack. His sight by day and dreams by night were filled with the reflected colours of uniform and glint of weapons; but still more by a growing awareness of his own capacity to command, to weld those shining masses into decisive factors, the spearheads of attack or the barriers of defence. And so he left Saleck.

On every hand were signs of unrest and a feeling of excitement, for France was drifting into the whirlpool of revolution. These were the times when the financial problem, despite the frenzied efforts of Calonne and Brienne to avert catastrophe, was bearing down upon the ship of state; when, in the wake of an exhausted credit, a cry went up that the States-General should be summoned, which meant that the right of redress should extend beyond the throne, the Parliament, and the privileged orders to that wide range of conflict and opinion, the people.

From that moment there was no denying the Revolution. And something of the same spirit flooded the hitherto obedient nature of Michel Ney, who went home only to announce his intention of becoming a soldier. The

women shed tears, while Papa Ney found it impossible to restrain his anger. Michel was a young fool, as witness his contempt for the legal profession and the lost chance of becoming a superintendent. There can be no greater pessimist than your old soldier, when he is so minded, and the disadvantages of following the drum underwent a drastic narration.

Young Ney settled the uncomfortable business by slamming the street door, without asking for so much as a franc, and booting the whole of the twenty miles that ran, from a north-easterly direction, into Metz. He possessed no more than the outfit in which he walked, and by the time he reached the garrison town his shoes had given way in a few places. Yet his thoughts, being singularly free from illusion as became his resistant nature, were undimmed. It had not been part of his policy to offend the old people, but what would you? A man must go as he is driven.

What had his father told him? *There's no money, no chance to rise, in the army.* Pardieu! Michel Ney would show them. When next he returned to Saarlouis he would be riding the devil's own charger, while guns spoke and people jostled for a sight of him in the street, and good bright money poured into the family coffer.

The date of his enlistment was December 6th 1788, and the corps of his choice was the Regiment Colonel-General (so-called from the Duke of Chartres), afterwards the 4th Hussars. And even at this point it is easier to imagine Ney as a finished soldier than as the proverbial recruit who casts awkward glances at his comrades and their quarters, at every new detail that unfolds itself, at the feeding utensils, the weapons, and finally at his bed. The hussars were looked upon as the winged warriors of the French service, fleet riders, daring fighters, and fickle lovers, experts in every department that spoke the man. Their uniform, in common with the rest of the cavalry excepting the green-clad dragoons, was predominantly blue. And in exchange for his own

rolled-up garb Ney received from the clothier's shelves a yellow-braided tunic and cloak of that colour, a red pelisse that showed a lining of white sheepskin, a shako with red and white trimmings, and a sabretache also of red.

It is reasonable to suppose that the old hands offered to direct the new trooper to the canteen; that he slogged through his foot exercises; cursed the presence of saddle boils after a long bout in the riding-school, and the dull ache that the extended arm and turned wrist of sword drill means to the cavalry novice. But, as already stated, Ney gives the impression of emerging ready-made, with riding-muscles taut and hardened, a master of the tan and the steel. It is a fact that he was soon regarded as the regimental swordsman, and was also given the most difficult mounts to manage.

The figure of Ney, with its somewhat jaunty air of self-confidence, squarely set shoulders, broad chest, and long legs that the skin-tight breeches showed to advantage, may always be found in every cavalry circle, where horses share with women the honour of being the subjects of conversation. Ney was well above the height of the average hussar, and his features, although strongly marked, were sensitive enough to reflect his mental changes. The forehead, lips, and chin indicated a stern moulding, while a metallic quality of frame gave evidence of the physical and vital resources that carried him from point to point of the European battlefield.

In keeping with the custom of his regiment Ney wore his hair fastened in a queue, as the hanging plait from the back of the head was called. And this, being of a bright auburn colour, soon earned him the nickname of 'Carrots', while at other times he was known as 'The Indefatigable'. Later on, whenever his command was in a tight corner, with only the sound of cannon to give them hope, his men would scatter encouragement among themselves by saying: 'Courage, there's the Red Lion roaring', or again: 'It will soon be all right: Peter the Red is coming.'

For soldiers the world over, and the French in particular, have an infinite capacity for belief in a trusted commander; and this, when expressed fully, exalts them to the level of children, with right to possess the kingdom.

It was not Ney's athletic qualities, however, that first attracted the notice of his superiors, but the fact that he wrote a legible hand, on which account he was given a bench in the quartermaster's office. He thus had his early experience to thank for a somewhat improved chance of gaining promotion, although at this stage his ambition could not soar above the possibility of becoming a lieutenant. That vision was reserved for the young nobles, who preferred pleasure and dissipation to the chance of acquiring military glory, which was the highest star in Ney's firmament.

Besides, his father had not exaggerated the privations of service, for even general officers at that time were receiving a meagre weekly dole of two francs. But in spite of that a regular proportion of young Ney's pittance, once he had reached the rank of subaltern, found its way back to Saarlouis, where his mother was now bed-ridden.

Meanwhile the year 1789 found the country reacting to a number of events that destroyed privilege and exclusion while clearing a way for talent. The proclamation of the equality of rights meant the judging of every man by his own deeds, without recourse to the barren conceit of ancestry or empty titles. The meeting of the States-General had been followed by the Commons delegating to themselves the name of National Assembly. The red cap had surged in triumph over the Bastille, and the Royal Family had been forced, by will of the people, to quit Versailles and take up residence in Paris, where the same people could watch them.

Ney was a plain soldier who set his country above politics, and never tuned his style and manner to the pompousness that was becoming typical of the patriot.

By exchanging the medium of oratory for the sword it is possible to liken him to a Danton in uniform, a being too wholly impetuous and forceful to deal with the petty counsel of mean men, a centre of action and yet a bulwark amid shifting sands, and whose failings derive from the noble order of peccancies that claim kinship with the old Puritan utterance: 'This thing was not done in a corner.' The various Revolutionary fevers passed him by, while yet preparing an atmosphere in which his sole means of promotion germinated.

Although the baton had fairly commenced its series of turns in the knapsack, the periods between them were long and surmounted only by merit. Early in January 1791 (during which year his mother died) Ney was promoted to the rank of brigadier, or corporal. Thirteen months later he was made sergeant-of-horse, while in May 1792 he was raised to sergeant-major. By this time the war clouds of the Revolution had darkened to a climax, and hostilities broke out between France and Austria. But, so far as it is possible to date the events which led to the Great Wars, the installation of the Empire, and the rise of the young men, that date was January 21st 1793, when Louis XVI went to the scaffold.

It brought home to aristocratic Europe the fact that its privileges were under challenge by the madness of democracy, and so the armies of the Coalition began the bloody tramp which came to a material climax at Waterloo; material, in that the spirit they sought to crush survived the British bayonet and the Prussian sabre. It was Napoleon who said: 'There are only two powers in the world, the spirit and the sword. In the long run, the sword will always be conquered by the spirit.' And the social-political rulings of the following century were pregnant with the spirit that reddened Europe by the frenzy of '93.

In tracing the career of Ney through such a period it is necessary to bear in mind the native simplicity which made him a soldier of the old school, his belief that the

military and social codes of honour were separate and distinct, his dislike of mixing the taint of brigandage with the business of war, and the regard with which he kept his fighting machine free of encumbrance. He recognized the starkness of his trade, and starkly performed it, so that those who search his life for more than the simple attributes of an honourable soldier will be disappointed.

It was this reservation that made Napoleon, in the time of his bitterness, condemn Ney as having showed himself 'a braggart without judgment and decision'. Yet if one would efface the drabness of a mechanical age by an epic of valour, there is no truer subject than this captain of an invincible rear-guard, of whom the same strict judge of men and motives also declared: 'Ney was the bravest of men.'

The earliest of his exploits was a duel, which occurred when he was only a brigadier, and might have had serious consequences but for the general relaxing of disciplinary bonds that accompanied the Revolution. Moreover, it was the sort of offence that officers were disposed to wink at, since it concerned the compromising of their regimental honour by a chasseur fencing-master, who had got the better of several hussars in previous encounters.

At last Ney was deputed to meet him, but no sooner had they crossed blades than the colonel appeared from nowhere and laid a startling clutch on Ney's pigtail. He got off with a confinement, however, which eventually left him free to face his antagonist a second time and in secret. Brigadier Ney made no mistake and opened his man's wrist, which proved so disabling that the chasseurs were forced to look for a new fencing-master. But later on, when success was assured him, Ney learnt that his old adversary of barrack-square days was in want, and with a gesture typical of the freemasonry of the knapsack he awarded him a pension.

There is also an incident recorded in the so-called *Memoirs of Ney*, which came from the pen of the Marshal's

second son, Michel Aloys. During Ney's service with the Army of the North there were frequent brushes with the British cavalry outposts, one of which resulted in Ney's squadron piercing the enemy lines and attacking a smug young staff officer with his escort. Ney marked and separated off the deity as his particular victim, only to be confronted by the offer of an open purse instead of a sword threat. This was replied to by an order for the baby general to ride through his own lines, which opened a way in thunderstruck amazement at the sight of the 'Goddam' and the Frenchy charging full tilt to the latter's head-quarters, where Ney told his captive to think twice in future before mixing a bribe with duty.

Every man serving under Ney knew his own place and that of his commander, which was anything up to forty yards ahead of the ranks whether in line of march or column of attack. Many a regimental officer has been more popular, for he retained the spice of his ancestral calling with the tongue to give it vent, and set a sacred value upon the carrying out of orders. He rode and took his meals alone, speaking no more than was necessary, while his staff soon learnt to restrict their answers to proper limits. It was a risky business to broach any topic to Michel Ney without encouragement, and those who behaved with undue familiarity were soon given the cold shoulder. But the way to his heart was to stand without flinching on the field of fire.

The brave man could count upon earning his recommendation, just as the exhibitor of nerves was certain of inviting rebuke. In one engagement an officer, who was making a report, ducked his head at the passing of a cannon-ball. 'Very well,' said Ney, dismissing him, 'but another time you needn't bow so low.' Not even Murat, or Lannes, surpassed Ney in the vigour of attack, while the fact that he carried a whole skin through so many hazards was little short of miraculous. Some one asked if he had ever experienced fear, and Ney's answer was the laconic: 'I never had time.'

He nevertheless found it possible to draw up a number of formidable general orders, which showed that no detail, for the good of his troops, escaped him. A feature of his discipline was that officers should avoid the company of other ranks at the inns, which mandate, at an earlier stage of the Revolution, would have been condemned as 'aristocratic'. But democracy, like other worldly factors, is merely relative, and not a voice was raised when Ney threatened to imprison an offender for a first offence, and to take away his commission for a second.

It would be a mistake, however, to confuse Ney's passionate belief in military glory with the attitude of a swashbuckling dragoon. For in principle, apart from the severity of his calling, he was opposed to bloodshed, and at a time when Royalists and Republicans were engaged in a series of desperate outbreaks and reprisals, which brought batches of the former to the guillotine, Ney was responsible for saving many a civilian by spreading them out among the military prisoners, and packing them off to the depots.

It was a dangerous game, especially when played out under the eyes of a People's Representative, as on the occasion when a number of priests were charged with incivism before Ney. He blustered, went as red as his hair, and threatened the priests with diabolical retribution. But when it was dark he gave them food and money and smuggled them to the nearest town. In the morning, when news of their 'escape' was brought, he swore roundly, but without deceiving the frigid Representative who remarked: 'Ney knows how to spare the blood of his countrymen.'

He even bearded the hectic General Kléber, who, when Ney was serving on his staff, dictated an order that would have led to the dismissal of a certain officer who had fallen low in the scale of Kléber's perilous affection. Ney was aware of his superior's casual motive, and declared that rather than repeat such an order he



would lose an arm. 'Have your own way,' said Kléber, when the flush of fury had died down. 'Let him remain.'

Another feature of his generalship was the promptness with which he stamped out excesses. On entering Zwingenbourg in 1799 his troops got out of hand and ran amuck, sacking and plundering. Ney had the guilty ones court-martialled and asked the authorities to assess the amount of damage, which he paid to the last farthing. The same thing followed upon the Austrian retreat from Darmstadt, where a few buildings were pillaged by Ney's troops occupying the centre. He apologized direct to the local prince for this breach of Republican manners, and made good their loss to the victims. Again, when it was brought to his notice that the contributions levied by the army commissaries in a district were out of proportion, and weighing more heavily upon one town than another, Ney was never too much the soldier to bend from his saddle and rectify the civil injustice.

A complaint is lodged that a general officer, under his command, has stolen a couple of horses, and Ney gives orders for the animals to be returned. The delinquent seeks to impose upon him by surrendering two shoddy mounts that he has roped in for the purpose. But the wise rider knows his own horses, and Ney has another solid talk with his subordinate. After this the beasts go back to their old stable, while the offending soldier is handed a slip which posts him to another division.

By these means Ney schooled and disciplined his troops, acting on the maxim that the most moral body was also the most formidable in battle. The record of one of his detachments during the early days, covering a period of nearly four months, makes mention of only two crimes among his men. He had the Napoleonic quality of remembering individual cases, and furthermore strengthened the confidence with which he was regarded by a readiness to admit the errors of judgment that sometimes resulted from his fiery temper.

A deficiency came to light in the soldiers' fund of a

certain cavalry regiment, and Ney blamed its colonel who, as later events proved, had not been responsible. Stung by his obduracy, the unfortunate colonel stayed away from a meeting of field officers, at which Ney presided. And this sensitive rebuke was not lost upon the red-headed Lorrainer, who went in person and forced the colonel from his retirement, with the many frank and full-blooded admissions of a repentant passion striving to make reparation.

Apart from his natural leadership, the secret of the respect he inspired was that men knew, in following Michel Ney, they were bound to no gamester or libertine. It is true that during the Rhine campaign a German girl (who, either through tact or the fashionable contempt for legitimacy, was referred to as Madame Ney), lived at his head-quarters. But she is no more than the palest of come-and-go lovers, a chance shadow that flecked for a moment the pathway of a soldier.

Moreover, he endeared himself by showing a seasoned capacity for a cardinal military virtue; namely, the ability to scrape a living from the bare ground. No matter how void the surroundings, how hostile the people, there was no need for his troops to stand still for want of food, clothing, or leather once Ney got the hang of the country-side. His source of supply, especially as it was known how heavily he punished marauders, was a frequent mystery; but as such it was an unfailing tonic to the blood of veterans, who, not unjustly, are quick to interpret a thoughtful provisioning as proof of their commander's merit.

Again, the old grumblers remembered such incidents as that which occurred at the capture of Elberfeld. Its citizens, mostly of the rich manufacturing class, offered Ney a princely sum on condition that he guarded the town against disorder. Ney was grateful in his acceptance, while stipulating that the money should be applied to setting up his troops, who hailed it as an action worthy of a general who had been 'one of themselves'.

That part of his career, and the manner of his unassisted advancement, was never far from the surface of Ney's mind. He regretted the diplomatic necessities of the Empire, when 'form' regained something of its old wind-blown significance, and which sometimes led to the elevation of a young officer whose name was more respected than his talents were conspicuous. To such as these he would say: 'I was less fortunate than you, gentlemen. I received nothing from my family, and I thought myself rich at Metz when I had two loaves of bread upon my shelf.' That was a man of pride speaking.

Another story refers to a banquet at which the newly created Marshal Ney, glittering with honours, turned aside from the flattery and congratulation to address an old officer, who seemed to have no part in the revelry. 'Do you remember, captain,' asked the laced dignitary, 'the time when you used to say to me, as I made my report to you, "Very well, Ney, continue as you are going, and you will make way, my lad"?'"

'Perfectly well, Monsieur le Marshal,' answered the other. 'I then had the honour to command one better than myself. Such things are not to be forgotten.' And with that their glasses touched, the women still smiled, while two old soldiers looked back upon the moments of reality.

The Napoleonic soldier remains a type, loyal to the Eagles while middling true to his own word. But by virtue of that positive sense which was the burden of the Revolution, and the care-free spirit of attack which lightened the early armies, it was possible for time and circumstance to produce a being of Ney's stature, of whom it may truly be said: He was a man.

### CHAPTER III

#### FROM VALMY TO THE DANUBE

THE declaration of war between France and Austria was made on April 20th 1792. It found France menaced by a threat of invasion from the Netherlands, which were then a wealthy part of the Austrian dominions, while other bodies were known to be striking across Europe with a machine-like precision that boded ill for the tricolour.

Before long Prussia declared on the side of Austria, while England and Russia sent their blessings preparatory to joining the Allies. The German states opened their arms to the Royalist emigrants, who were soon incorporated among the great masses that goose-stepped through the Lowlands, or by way of the Moselle and the Rhine. Their goal was Paris, where the Duke of Brunswick, who commanded the Allies, intended to deal summarily with the sansculottes who had dared to topple a crown with their rude weapons.

But the early intoxication was still upon France, and the country made a vast effort to meet the tide before it deluged the frontier. On July 5th it was solemnly announced in the Assembly that the country was in danger. Every citizen was called to don the blue coat and shoulder a weapon, which was hammered out on the local forge while the women plied their needles through stiff clothing. The atmosphere in which these moves went forward was a prolonged 14th of July, a high frenzy of exultation. Three armies, each approximating 50,000 men, were formed under Lafayette, Rochambeau, and Luckner, while the management of foreign affairs was entrusted to Dumouriez, a good general but whose proneness to intrigue became a weakness.

So it was that Ney's regiment (rechristened for a time the 5th Hussars) jingled its way out from Metz under a July sunlight, in division of three squadrons numbering nearly 700 sabres. On the 14th of that month Ney had been promoted to the highest non-commissioned rank in the French Army, that of adjutant, which again brought him into contact with the methodical ordering of military existence. The 5th Hussars, as part of Lafayette's command, went into camp at Carignan, before entering upon that diverse and widely extended campaign from which emerge the problem of Valmy, the important victories at Jemappes and Fleurus, and the crowning landmark of Hohenlinden.

Meanwhile the Allies were bidding fair to realize their plans for an easy march on the capital. The forts of Sedan, Longwy, and Verdun were crumpled up like so much paper, until one last line of defence under Dumas remained to hold the passes of the Argonne, that district of broken ground extending for over forty miles from the south-west of Sedan.

The passes held by the French were few in number and enclosed by wood or marshland, itself a natural barrier, while old Kellermann, with his chronic Alsatian accent and a fresh body of troops, was operating at the southern end of the Argonne. Altogether there were some 50,000 French with forty guns in the neighbourhood, though not more than 36,000 of these shared the honours of Valmy, where Ney saw his first battle on September 20th.

It is on this account, apart from the significance of what may be called the strangest battle in history, that the events of that day claim more than an outline. For Valmy, as seen by the eye, was a small nondescript affair, yet one fraught with so great a consequence as to make possible the Napoleonic adventure.

Two armies, composed of 60,000 Prussians and 45,000 Austrians, representing the pick of Europe, together with 12,000 emigrants, trickled through the Ardennes

intending to strike Paris by way of Chalons. Their sole remaining obstacle was peopling the defiles of the Argonne, which, Dumouriez hoped, would force the enemy to expose a flank by marching right round to evade the difficult country. The numbers actually to engage were, if anything, slightly in favour of France, but whereas the Allies were highly trained and so far victorious the carmagnole levies had yet to make their first stand.

Their defeat appeared still more certain when the Germans, instead of making the required detour, found a way through one of the lesser ridges. Dumouriez, within a hair's-breadth of destruction, retreated southward to St. Meneshould, and took up a position which, Napoleon was to say, would have exceeded his own colossal daring to have defended. But the general, with his troops on the verge of panic, had no illusions, and spoke of the place becoming the French Thermopylae; with which comparison the Prussians, pounding along on rations of boiled corn and chalky water (for their transport had broken down on the bad roads) would have been in agreement.

The position to be held by Kellermann when he arrived was a high stretch directly covering the way to Paris, known as Dampierre's Camp. But instead of halting there he skirted westward and crossed the Aube to concentrate at the mill and hamlet of Valmy, thus creating a gap between the two French armies by which the invaders, debouching from the upper Argonne, were left in closer proximity to Paris than were its defenders. It was now within Brunswick's power to crush first Kellermann, then Dumouriez.

Ney's post in this astonishing situation was with General Dillon's brigade, on the left of the line among the high-wooded country of Les Islettes. This was the scene of some brittle fighting as the Prussians attempted to force the southernmost point and rear of Kellermann's force, while others poured down to occupy the space

between the two armies. The grey of early morning yielded no more than the summits of the surrounding hills, whose bases were enveloped by a thick fog. But about ten o'clock the weather was sufficiently clear for the Prussian attack to develop.

To the general astonishment the French line stood firm, while its artillery played upon the Prussians with good effect. They seemed on the verge of halting and the French infantry, encouraged by this observation and the fact that their guns were being well served, summoned up a cry of 'Vive la nation!' At last the Prussians halted, and turned back. On they came again after a brief rally, only to break, this time in open retreat, still under a steady fire.

Such was the epic of Valmy field, where the trifling operations and casualties were wholly out of proportion to the moral effect. For it showed that France, despite her threadbare Revolutionary garb, was capable of applying the theories she had been called upon to account for; and with that the fear of their imposition passed into the European conscience.

At the time, however, it needed a poet to estimate the spiritual meaning of what, in the military sense, had been a virtual fiasco. And luckily there was an onlooker among the Prussians, drawn by the curiosity of his kind to sample a cannonade, who thus voiced his impression: 'From this place, and from this day forth, commences a new era in the world's history; and you can all say that you were present at its birth.' The lonely interpreter of that revelation was Goethe.

The period of Valmy also marks the emergence of Michel Ney as a sub-lieutenant. And it was then usual for the comrades of a soldier reaching commissioned rank to shoot his knapsack to pieces, as a sign that it was no longer part of his equipment.

Encouraged by this unexpected repulse of the invaders Dumouriez swept into Belgium, where on November 6th Ney was present at what may be called

the first real battle of the Republic. The name of Jemappes, where it occurred, is less remarkable for the credit it reflects on the victorious French (who nearly forfeited their numerical superiority by bad arrangements), than for the initiation of that spirit of attack which became typical of the Revolution. Within a few weeks the newly embodied verve had carried the tri-colour throughout Belgium, to overshadow the whole of the Netherlands as far as Antwerp.

But by now the war was attaining a truly European character. For months past the Republic had been confronted by a veiled enemy in the shape of England, whose aristocratic and maritime considerations had led her into becoming the friend, and also the purse, of every kingship threatened by the draught of democracy. At last, having been responsible for several secret alliances and subsidies, she was forced into the open by France declaring war on February 1st 1793, in little over a week after the execution of Louis. Before long the anti-French coalition numbered the Powers of Great Britain, Austria, Prussia, Bavaria, Holland, Spain, Portugal, Naples, Tuscany, and Sardinia, to which Russia and Turkey were soon added.

When the French continued their move beyond Brussels, which fell on November 14th, the advance-guard was commanded by General Lamarche, with subaltern Ney serving as aide-de-camp. He was in a sharp skirmish at Tirlemont, while at the village of Gossoncourt, following an enemy attack, Ney rode alongside his general at the head of the 5th Hussars and returned with a bag of prisoners. But the impetus acquired at the victory of Jemappes encountered a set-back on March 1st at Neerwinden, where Ney's unit, as part of the right column, was routed by the Austrian cavalry.

This disaster was followed by the loss of Dumouriez, who went over to the Allies. The command was then held by Dampierre, who was soon killed, and afterwards by Lamarche. But as Commander-in-Chief this general



had too many enemies, who took advantage of a retreat he made from Famars to denounce him as a drunkard, and so secure his dismissal. When Lamarche was superseded on July 30th, Ney exchanged staff work for a return to regimental duties, carrying with him a testimonial that emphasized his courage, insight, and general resourcefulness. Later on he recalled these early associations by placing his old general in command of a veteran brigade.

Meanwhile the army, following its losses, had been reshuffled and placed upon a new footing, in accordance with which the 5th were again known as the 4th Hussars. This was the ultimate title of the regiment in which Ney, on October 13th, was promoted lieutenant.

For a time he was attached to the staff of a cavalry brigade under General Colaud, in stations along the Marne. This officer also testified to the courage and loyal Republicanism of Ney, on the latter's rise to the rank of captain which occurred on April 21st 1794. He then returned to his regiment to take over a company, which at that time was composed of two squadrons, the left and the right.

During the summer the Army of Belgium received a new title under which it passed into the realm of heroic inspiration—the Army of the Sambre-et-Meuse. It was by no means the most perfect of the Republican bodies to be formed, and failed to achieve a record of enduring victory. But it carried the spirit of the Revolution upon its bayonets; it represented the type of an armed tribunal at bay against the world, and was the training-ground for more than one future Marshal, including Ney.

Much of this legendary glory was reflected upon its commander, plain, simple Jourdan, who had once peddled drapery about the provinces, who fought with a stolidity that earned him the name of 'The Anvil', and took terrible oaths, like the old-fashioned warrior he was, upon his sword. The left wing of the Sambre-et-Meuse was led by Kléber, a rugged Alsatian whose great fighting spirit was only matched by his warmth of

temper, as indicated by every change of his passionate expression. 'General,' he would cry one moment, embracing Napoleon, 'how great you are!' And the next: 'Look at the little scoundrell! No bigger than my boot!'

The 4th Hussars, with Captain Ney at the head of his company, were placed under Kléber at the early stages of the triumph that for some time marked the passage of the Sambre-et-Meuse. At every turn the nation showed its appreciation of the political struggle that was embodied by Jourdan's men, sending deputations to applaud them, feasting them at great tables set in the open, and greeting their march with showers of sweets, blooms, and ribbons. It was this awareness that guided the pen of a young soldier to inscribe in a battle letter: 'We fought one against five, but *La Marseillaise* was fighting with us.'

On June 25th they defeated the Allies under Coburg at Fleurus, which drove the invader from French soil. A feature of this battle which must have interested Ney, whose mind had a turn for curious inventions, was that the French employed the first balloon to observe hostilities. Most of the information that its navigators, in the excitement of the moment, sent to the ground by means of ropes was inaccurate, and Jourdan was right in saying that its real service was to astonish the enemy.

Kléber's army pressed on and forced the evacuation of Mons, from which point Ney went ahead and received the keys of Brussels on July 11th. Four days later they drove the Austrians from their lines fronting Louvain, while on the 16th Ney's company was sent to locate the movements of the retreating rear-guard. He was invariably chosen for tasks requiring a sound judgment, while he also impressed by his rare but elemental ability in returning a straightforward answer.

The result was that Kléber attached him to the staff with the temporary rank of adjutant-general, which Ney regarded with some disfavour at first as likely to hamper

the normal work of a field officer. But he need not have worried, for besides preserving order among the civil population the new duties meant that he acted as general scout to the army and was responsible for the safety of its flanks and transport. This entailed long riding and ceaseless vigilance at the head of an *élite* body of horse, intersected by such exploits as that performed during the advance on Pelenberg.

Ney had ridden some way ahead of the main body with a handful of dragoons and chasseurs, when its front ranks were assailed by a sudden charge of Austrian hussars. Although outnumbered Ney made a lightning turn and broke up the surprise, which feat was reported by Kléber to the Permanent Envoy of the Government with the Army. This brought Ney the appointment of a staff major.

The month of August found Kléber settling down to besiege Maestricht, which was quiet work. But on the 26th Ney relieved the monotony by riding from Diest to Peer, a distance of twenty miles round the right of the enemy, and capturing a large convoy. One of his men deserted and betrayed the whereabouts of the raiders, and when Ney, after adding to his captures on the 27th, turned back for home, he found the way blocked by cavalry. Ney was upon them like a whirlwind and hacked his way through, and even carried the Austrian leader back to the French lines. The soldier of twenty-five was now marked as a coming man by the authorities, who promptly made him a colonel.

The progress of the Sambre-et-Meuse continued through early autumn, until, by the first week in October, the Austrians found themselves upon the left bank of the Rhine. Their positions and barricades were powerless to stem the series of surprises launched by Bernadotte, who now commanded the van of Kléber's army, and sustained by the dash of Ney's column which struck and pursued on the fringes of the advance. On September 28th he captured a string of barges as they

moved down river to Maestricht, with a load of munitions; while at the battle of the Roer, on October 2nd, he was again in the limelight.

The point chosen for the crossing of that river was opposite Ratheim, where an island, overshadowed by steep wooded banks, provided a foothold. Bernadotte paid full tribute to Ney for his share in the movement, which extended the Sambre-et-Meuse in three pursuing columns whose goals were Düsseldorf, Cologne, and Coblenz. Ney with his flying horsemen pressed on the rout to Düsseldorf.

The army of ex-pedlar Jourdan was now regarded as the finest in Europe. The National Convention decreed a standard, 'To the Sambre-et-Meuse from a grateful country', while Carnot declared: 'These young warriors have shown that in firmness and stability they can surpass all that history tells us of the Greek phalanx and the Roman legion.'

In this spirit Ney rode out on October 4th with a small body of horse and foot, and a couple of guns, to intercept an enemy convoy at Neuss, before it could reach the Rhine crossing at Düsseldorf. Contrary to expectations, however, the convoy remained in the streets instead of taking to the open, whereupon Ney swept through the town and captured the wagons that had not been fired during the panic. Next morning he hung on the heels of the Austrians as far as Düsseldorf, only withdrawing when their artillery spoke from the walls.

He was next employed to consolidate the district abandoned by the enemy, stretching from Meuse to Rhine. Later on he joined the besiegers in front of Maestricht, which surrendered early in November after Ney, under a flag of truce, had communicated with the civil authorities.

Meanwhile the old haberdasher general was anxious to secure Ney for his own staff, but Kléber held up the transfer by appealing to the Committee of Public Safety.

Before any decision had been arrived at, however, Kléber was ordered to reduce Mayence, and the burly Alsatian, doomed to the comparative idleness of a siege, puckered his face and broke down like a schoolgirl.

Ney, as usual, was soon on the look-out for openings to distinguish himself, and on December 10th his efforts for the first time ended disastrously. He planned a combined attack, with foot and dragoons, upon an Austrian outwork, a stroke in the spirit of the Sambre-et-Meuse, to use his own expression. The ground was frozen and he saw that the horses were well roughed, to avoid slipping; then, as the infantry launched a shadow attack in front, he made his way with the mounted troops to the rear of the position.

But there they encountered an unexpected obstacle in the shape of a ditch. While the others drew rein to consider Ney spurred across it, plunging among the Austrians single-handed, and then followed a few sharp moments of consummate sword-play by which he avoided capture. Rounding his horse's head he again took the ditch when a bullet, fired from the outwork, penetrated his arm. Medical examination pronounced that the limb need not be sacrificed, but Ney developed a high fever and gibbered like a madman at the approach of the surgeon. His temperament was not suited to failure and sick-bed service.

At last a truly desperate remedy was adopted. A number of village girls and their swains, with musical instruments, were assembled by Kléber, who formed the opinion that the soothing measure of a dance might succeed where medicine had failed in driving away the delirium. He then proceeded to lead his band of rustics in dancing the farandole round Ney's bedside, capering and disporting his huge frame like a clumsy giant. Such a sight must have been sufficient to kill or cure any man, and in Ney's case it brought recovery.

But his time of convalescence was clouded by depression, in spite of the talk that he was soon to be

raised to the rank of brigadier-general. Ney waved it aside, harping back to his sorry failure at the Austrian outwork; and the official recommendation called forth a consistent 'no' from his chafing spirit. There was no arguing with such a man, and he was packed off in a carriage for a spell of rest at Saarlouis, or Sarrelibre, as an outburst of Jacobin enthusiasm had temporarily called his birthplace.

He was back at head-quarters by the middle of February 1795, that year of ill-omen for the Sambre-et-Meuse which was forced to take up its old positions along the Rhine. Ney had rejoined the staff of Kléber, who now commanded four divisions of the army, but apart from some dashing reconnaissances the red-headed colonel was a quenched unit in that desolate body which had once been the pride of France. There was a great shortage of clothing, food, and ammunition, until beggary and plundering became more frequent and were tolerated by the helpless commanders.

The spirit of '93 broke down under accumulated reverses and a feeling of injustice. For men could read in the news-sheet and bulletins of the happier conditions under which the Army of Italy was going forward, where soldiers were paid in cash instead of the paper money that was notorious for shifting value. It was true that the German states together with Spain, Portugal, and Naples had dropped out of the Coalition during the year, but when Jourdan was offered a truce in December he snapped it without hesitation.

His men recuperated somewhat in winter quarters, but the armistice came to an end in May 1796, with the Austrian forces placed on a more capable footing under the Archduke Charles. Jourdan still conducted the Sambre-et-Meuse through its twilight, while an Army of the Rhine was also formed and placed under Moreau.

This last named was an implacable Republican who came to regard the setting up of the Empire as a betrayal of early principles. He was more scientific but

less fiery than the average French commander, which made him for a time the most serious of Napoleon's rivals. As such he refused to attend the Consular Court which entailed the wearing of a state uniform, mocked at the treaty of peace with the Catholic Church, and when the Legion of Honour was formed he sent his dog out decked in a mimic collar. He was finally put on trial for high treason, exiled, and later died in service against his country.

By the beginning of June, Ney was across the Rhine in the vicinity of Düsseldorf, harassing the Austrian flanks and rear with his cavalry. His general objective was Frankfort, and during the operations Soult, moving on the left, was cut off from the main body. It was Ney's business to recall him, and riding with half a squadron of hussars through a region patrolled by the Austrians he made it possible for Soult to regain contact at Hackenburg.

At one time during the ride Ney, with his horse wounded by a round of case-shot, was attacked by three mounted emigrants. 'Vive le Roi!' shouted the first, striking at Ney. 'Vive la Republique!' answered the hussar, cutting his man from the saddle. It was a lesson for Jourdan to anticipate the Napoleonic theory of concentration, and not to straggle his columns about the country.

To soldiers of the old school, to which Moreau belonged, strategy was often identical with hesitation. It was not until June 20th that he passed the Rhine, and this delay had caused Jourdan to fall back upon the lower crossings with Ney, at the head of 800 cavalry, blocking the pursuit. But Moreau's protracted movement was a sign for part of the Austrians to leave Jourdan in order to oppose the Rhine Army, which practically cleared the southern highways for an eruption of the Sambre-et-Meuse.

So it was that the opening of July found two parallel blocks of the tricolour sliding into Germany, with a

helpless wedge of Austrians carried between them. Ney's advance-guard had now been raised to the strength of three cavalry regiments, three battalions of infantry, with two guns, and this little force led the way into Frankfort on the 29th. But the condition of the troops had worsened, and part of the indemnity paid by Frankfort was expended on boots and clothing.

From Lohr, which he captured, Ney swept on to Forcheim, which was strong enough to have compelled the army to sit down before it. But Ney reduced the fortress single-handed, without so much as summoning his own column. He threatened its commander so roundly that the terrified custodian was only too glad to open the gates and put an end to the military fluid; which so decided Kléber as to his worth that he made him a brigadier-general that very evening. He was then twenty-seven.

Thus encouraged by the revelation that his tongue was as potent as a group of guns Ney made a dash from Nuremburg, which was captured on August 10th, and drew rein before the stronghold of Rothenburg. Calling for the commander, and without a shot being fired on either side, he swore down yet another fortress. But the time of success was coming to an end, together with the flat country which had so far favoured an advance. The Austrians had reorganized their line of defence in the broken ground beyond, while Moreau had again taken root and lost touch with Jourdan.

There was nothing for the old haberdasher but to fall back, as he did on August 23rd, thus giving Moreau the motive for a similar move directed towards the Rhine. And while the tongue of the cooerage had been efficacious in demolishing barriers, it was powerless against the cloud of melancholy that covered the two retirements. The sudden turn-about had converted Ney's position into that of a rear-guard, which species of tactics was to prove his title to immortality. But the second day of the retreat brought him disaster, for the Austrians,



finding a gap between his meagre force of two mounted regiments and two battalions of infantry, were able to detach him from the main body under Kléber. Ney led the cavalry in a desperate charge and effected a breakthrough, but the infantry had to be left as spoil to the Whitecoats.

The 11th of September found him at Giessen, where the spirited townsmen endeavoured to capture half his troops by suddenly closing the gates while their march was in progress. Having arranged his guns outside the walls Ney turned back, bearing a flag of truce, and levelled a few sanguinary threats which, under the circumstances, would have taxed his performance. But, as at Forcheim and Rothenburg, they literally took the heart from the men of Giessen, who were thankful to see and hear the last of that terrible rear-guard.

Meanwhile the general depression of his army had ascended to Jourdan who, in answer to several requests, was replaced by General Beurnonville at the end of September. The Sambre-et-Meuse was then dotted along the Sieg, a tributary of the Lower Rhine, with Ney in position on the left. Beurnonville, who signed an armistice which lasted to the middle of April 1797, was soon glad to resign in favour of Hoche, a great Republican soldier. Previous to this Ney had been recommended for the rank of general, which step, however, was refused by the Paris authorities. On February 13th he took over the advance-guard of Grenier's division, and made his head-quarters at Birkenfeld with the 2nd Hussars, 6th Chasseurs, three infantry battalions, and light artillery, in all some 3,000 men.

But one of Hoche's first moves was to reorganize the army, with the cavalry formed in three divisions under General d'Hartpoul. And on March 7th Brigadier-General Ney was given command of the Hussar Division, comprising the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th Regiments.

The armistice had barely terminated before the French were again swarming over the Sieg and the Rhine, and

Ney was exchanging thrusts with the Austrian rear-guard. By now the advantage of numbers rested with Hoche, since the enemy had poured reinforcements across the Alps to counter the onset of Napoleon, who was bathed in the glories of Rivoli and Castiglione. It was now only a matter of days before this stage of hostilities between France and Austria was concluded by the Treaty of Leoben.

But it still left time for Ney to encounter another disaster, which occurred in the vicinity of Giessen on the 21st. Part of his artillery was overwhelmed by a charge of Austrian lancers, who were then scattered by a squadron of hussars led by Ney in person. These in turn were broken up by a rush of dragoons, and in the struggle Ney's horse was wounded and threw its rider. He gained his feet to find himself surrounded by Austrians, and while his right hand grasped the stump of a broken sword he attempted to seize a riderless mount with the other. But he was charged down and carried off as a prisoner in the wake of the enemy's retirement.

It was a severe blow for one whose entire notions of life and honour were centred in his military reputation, and Hoche, in subtle appreciation of Ney's outlook, sent him a reassuring letter together with a tricolour sash such as bound the waists of Republican generals. Meanwhile the Austrians were deriving amusement from no less a creature than Ney's horse, which, not having been badly wounded, had accompanied its master. The animal could not be persuaded to move a foot, which they attributed to asinine docility. Ney offered to enlighten them and swung into the saddle, whereupon his horse, aware of a familiar seat, bolted like a streak of lightning and almost succeeded in carrying the prisoner to safety. 'Well, gentlemen,' smiled Ney, dismounting within their circle, 'what do you think? Isn't it true that the worth of a horse depends on that of its rider?'

He secured his release on parole on May 6th and

returned to the French lines at Giessen, where, after further negotiations, he was exchanged for a captured Austrian of equal rank. While for the rest of the year, apart from continuing command of the Hussar Division, he superintended cavalry work at Mayence and Homburg.

The early months of 1798 found only England at grips with the Republic, which already was toying with plans for overstepping the Channel. In accordance with these Ney and two hussar regiments, the 3rd and 5th, were despatched to Amiens, where they arrived on March 4th. But the coastal preparations were soon abandoned in favour of Napoleon's Egyptian venture, and Ney was given a short leave before entering upon another round of garrison duty at Lille.

Things were quiet until the spring of 1799, when France and Austria again opened hostilities and Jourdan, who had already passed his best, was summoned to lead the new army. Ney in the meantime had held a variety of commands before joining the Rhine concentration at Mayence on February 24th, again under Bernadotte. The actual date for this latest crossing of the river was March 1st, but Ney preceded Jourdan's move by performing a typical exploit on the last evening of February.

It was in connexion with the town of Mannheim, which the German authorities continued to hold in defiance of a treaty by which it had been made over to France.

Ney's project was to enforce its surrender and facilitate the advance by reconstructing a bridge of boats, which partly demolished structure was moored along the western bank. For this purpose he detached the 8th Dragoons, some infantry, and three guns, which he placed in a covering position. Then, relying upon a civilian garb and his knowledge of German, he made a wide circuit and quietly entered the town.

According to his observations it was ripe for assault, for he saw no guns and very little of its garrison; while by dint of carefully chosen talk he judged the citizens

to be reposing upon a belief of absolute security. This was enough for Ney, who worked back to his own position and broke up the unwarranted calm of Mannheim with a few artillery bouquets. Then, taking boat and a white flag, he was rowed across and summoned the authorities to capitulate.

Judging by the earlier results of this procedure it is likely that Ney's words were responsible for more panic than the bursting of his shells. In either case the town surrendered and the pontoon was soon floated, with the French pouring across it to pass in the direction of Philippsburg.

A month of dreary operations followed, at the end of which Ney was created General of Division. He at once sent a refusal to the War Minister, who settled the argument on May 4th by announcing that the promotion must be accepted as ordered by the Directory. It came at a time when the enemies of France, now openly joined by Russia, were gaining renewed force, while Jourdan and Bernadotte reflected the growing paralysis of their commands by resigning. The next step was the merging of the Rhine force into the Army of the Danube and Switzerland, which was led by Masséna.

In pursuance with this change Ney was given a number of unimportant posts, such as that which found him at Mesocco in the vilest of wintry weather and with the mere shadow of his usual command, which was still more reduced by privations. Relief was only obtained in the shape of a general retreat over the St. Gothard, when Ney's force acted as rear-guard. From there he was sent to serve under Oudinot at Winterthur, where he arrived on May 24th and received command of an outpost detachment two days later.

This was a dark season for the Republic, which was facing disaster in southern Germany, Switzerland, and beyond the Alps. Ney celebrated his first active appearance as divisional general by courting defeat on the 27th,

when he showed himself a thoughtless cavalryman by sending infantry forward without sufficient preparation. He was driven back, two horses were killed under him, while he received a couple of wounds that necessitated a brief rest at Colmar. This little diversion cost about 800 casualties in killed, wounded, and prisoners.

His next force, under the title of the 6th Division, was attached to the left flank of the Army of the Danube, and included the 1st and 8th Chasseurs, 17th Dragoons, six infantry battalions, with some light artillery and a company of engineers. From the last week in July, when he returned to the field, till the middle of August, things were at a standstill, but Ney kept his command on tiptoe for an emergency. And since Winterthur was still on the horizon he probably schooled himself as to the need of efficient co-operation between horse and foot.

The front flared up again on the night of August 15th, just as Ney was on the point of leaving to take over the 5th Division. Hastily flinging aside every preparation he gathered his men and rushed them to the banks of the Aar, where the Austrians, under cover of a fierce attack, were endeavouring to swing bridges. Bayonets crossed at the village of Klein Dettingen, and this time Ney was so far from making a mistake that the results left the enemy in need of another armistice.

Following an interlude at Brugg with the 5th Division, Ney was recalled to the Army of the Rhine, now commanded by General Müller, who was a spineless and vacillating product of political workings. He was suitably placed in south Germany, which had now become the field of comparatively minor operations; but both these facts threatened to conflict with the fiery Ney.

With the French driven back to the wrong sides of the Adige and the Mincio, Mantua re-taken, and a stiffening of Suvaroff's Russians opposing Masséna, the Rhine army was to stage an attack in the hope of relieving the pressure. Ney was accordingly sent to Steinsfurth on

August 28th with part of the 3rd Hussars, two foot battalions, and a sprinkling of artillery, from which point he opened the demonstration by advancing to Heilbronn. Even at this early stage the weakness of the enemy in that quarter was quite apparent, and Ney, sure of an easy victory, sent back to Mannheim for reinforcements.

But Müller had already taken alarm, and instead of granting Ney's request told him to resume his original position at Steinsfurth. What the hell! grumbled the hussar general, fuming his way back along the roads that he had swept clear of the enemy. Yet that was not all, for on reaching Steinsfurth he found Müller had withdrawn still farther, which meant that his own meagre force was isolated. It was true that an Austrian concentration behind the Black Forest had been reported, but Müller had not even waited to sight them.

Ney wrote him a snorting letter, mentioning that owing to his lack of support he must take care, otherwise the peasants would drive him out with pitchforks. Then, as though to demonstrate how a soldier should act in the face of adversity, he re-occupied Heilbronn, and on September 8th was at Lauffen.

This, of course, was merely bravado, for when the Austrian offensive developed the French retreated to the left bank of the Rhine, with only Mannheim on the opposite shore still floating the tricolour. The centre of the new position was held by a weak force under Roche, with Ney, also at the head of totally inadequate numbers, supporting him on the thirty-mile front from Worms to Speyer. It was a mere cobweb of resistance, and the two generals knew that to show fight was the utmost of their ability.

The need came on August 18th, when Mannheim fell and Roche's centre was nearly broken. Ney, rushing to his assistance, was slightly wounded, and to crown matters Müller, who was well in the background, decided to issue orders. The result was total bewilderment, but luckily the weather took a hand by turning to

rain. This so increased the river that Ney, opening the canal sluices, swamped the flat country below Mannheim. But Müller continued glancing over his shoulder, and before the end of September he was recalled, for General Ney to be given provisional leadership of the Rhine Army.

In the short time before its regular commander, Lecourbe, took over from him on October 24th, Ney was sufficiently active to put the troops in good heart again following their recent depression. His operations naturally counted for little in the full scale of war, since the army had fallen away until it resembled a number of small detachments with no central striking power or significance. But yet he redeemed it from moral failure, which effort is the ultimate test of a general's capacity.

A scanty force may always retain the advantage of mobility, and from his head-quarters at Hagenau Ney formed the skeleton assembly into three divisions and an advance-guard. At a more propitious time these divisions would have been recognized as being little stronger than brigades, and the wisdom of Ney's bluff was called into question by his staff. But when, early in October, an advance was ordered along the line of the river, the Austrians were deceived into over-estimating the actual numbers opposing them, and dropped back.

On the evening of the 17th the French re-entered Mannheim, and were soon swarming again over the ground which had been surrendered by Müller. Perhaps it was that Ney wished to acquire a record of undivided success during his little time of authority, and extended his aims too far by holding a line on the left bank of the Neckar from Heidelberg to Schwetzingen. But the arrival of Lecourbe found the troops in high feather, equally ready to march, fight, or chorus the charms of Liberty. Ney was given the 3rd Division and continued to head the advance along the Elsenz, until by November 2nd he had carried Lauffen and swept beyond

Heilbronn. From there he contemplated a move on Belsigheim, but almost simultaneously the Austrians, realizing that they were confronted by a shadow and not the body of the Republic, struck back.

Ney was tumbled out of his easy captures, and in barely a month, after a series of outpost actions and skirmishes, the French were occupying their old positions on the left of the Rhine.

This part of the campaign, which had never approached the true magnitude of military movements, closed down without inspiration. So far Ney had taken part in a succession of minor engagements which invariably ended in failure, but no thought of having entered the wrong profession seems to have struck him. Once again their retreat was serving to show up the desolate condition of the French, who, ragged and shoeless, were soon scouring the country-side for provisions. A few threads of discipline maintained the semblance of an army, while d'Hilliers, who took the place of Lecourbe, was only saved by an indefinite truce which lasted throughout the winter.

Yet this was quite in accordance with one side of the soldier's medal, according to Michel Ney. Crusts and broken leather marked a damnable but essential stage in the path to glory, like wounds and mutilation, or perhaps dying. Was it for one who rode with the hussars to let his fighting spirit be overcome because he was going hungry? Such a weakness belonged to the chimney-corner men whom he had scorned in the old days at Saarlouis. True enough, he had shown sufficient regard for peace and retirement, as interlude between the whiles of fighting, to purchase La Petite Malgrange, a small house in the green surroundings of Nancy; and with one of his wounds threatening trouble he left the Rhine to rest there at the end of January.

But great events were being prepared in the spring of 1800. Napoleon, having made a diplomatic sounding of the intentions of London and Vienna, and finding



them implacable, was turning the military compass in ever-widening circles. Moreau was given command of a re-formed army in the Rhine district, in which one of the corps was under St. Cyr with head-quarters at Basle; and among the divisional commanders appointed to this corps in March 1800 was General Ney.

The new Army of the Rhine extended from Strassburg to the gate of Switzerland. Its total strength was round about 200,000, which during the first moves greatly exceeded that of the Austrian forces under Kray, who was a partisan of the old school which took its death-blow from the Republic. Not that Moreau, whose genius only came to light on the battlefield, ordered his moves according to the whirlwind legacy of the Revolution. Time and again his crawl through southern Germany exasperated Bonaparte, who would have forced a battle in less time than it took Moreau to gain his stride. But in spite of that the phantom bugles of the Sambre-et-Meuse were adding their clearness to the Napoleonic symphony; and henceforth, during as many years as were pleasing to the God of Battles, its theme was a march of conquest.

Ney's division (the 1st of the corps under St. Cyr), which was again chosen to act as vanguard, crossed the Rhine in the early sunless hours of April 25th. It was made up of the 8th Chasseurs, 25th Heavy Cavalry, the 54th, 76th, and 103rd Regiments, 12th Light Infantry, two batteries of light artillery and a company of engineers. The general pace was slow, with the Austrians continuing to fall back, but on May 6th Ney encountered a sharp resistance before entering Sigmaringen. Shortly after this Moreau, with his army spread along the Iller, made a false move on the left which created a dangerous gap. But before the Austrian flank could take advantage Ney, who was keeping the place assigned him in touch with the enemy, rushed his guns to the spot and so prevented a deluge. A keener soldier than Kray would have noted that the French corps were advancing on

too wide a front, and attempted to hammer wedges between them. The advance was allowed to continue, however, tardy but without show of hindrance, till June 4th.

That night saw the launching of a fierce enemy attack on the banks of the Iller. Still in the place of honour on the flank Ney received the full weight, and with a command that had been reduced to the 8th Chasseurs and the three line regiments. But he encountered it in characteristic fashion, receiving not with volleys but with a taste of Republican steel that outshone the assaulting column and scattered it with a loss of 300 prisoners, two guns and a quantity of ammunition. Kray fell back in the direction of Nordlingen, while Moreau continued plodding according to rule.

Meanwhile Ney had received some reinforcements in the shape of the 2nd Hussars and 19th Cavalry. He made a successful attack on the enemy rear at Stotzingen, with occasional captures of men and transport. But at the present rate of progress, he grumbled, the Austrians would be left a clear field of withdrawal to the north-east. Why not loosen the whole weight of French cavalry on the rear of their columns, and provoke a turn? A couple of days spent in rapid movement would almost certainly force a decisive battle. The commander of the left wing, General Grenier, also expressed this opinion, while Napoleon wrote in similar strain to Moreau. But without effect; the tradition of correct lines and orderly investment held sway, while the enemy followed the left bank of the Danube to Ratisbon.

On July 1st Ney moved to besiege Ingolstadt, which was held by an Austrian officer whose name, General Neu, inspired the bivouac sally of 'Nez contre nez' ('nose to nose'). Incidentally there may have been more of relationship than mere coincidence in the encounter, since the Lorraine family had sometime observed that alternative spelling.

Meanwhile Kray had been driven to seek an armistice,

which was signed on the 15th. But news spread slowly in those days, and before reaching Ingolstadt there was a bloody fight north of the town when the occupiers, trying to slide out under cover of darkness, were scattered by a rally of French sabres.

The terms of truce provided for the Austrians to continue manning their positions, which, in the case of Ingolstadt, meant that Ney was responsible for the regular passing of supplies to the garrison. He took advantage of the lull in operations to apply for leave, as latterly his health had suffered; and this was only granted after October 6th, when a further condition of the armistice had led to the occupation of Ingolstadt by the French.

But he was not yet destined to see the flowering of the country-side about his home. Before November was through he heard that hostilities were on the point of resumption, and later of his attachment to Grenier's corps, which was spread along the Iser. So taking coach from La Petite Malgrange he travelled to Freising, the headquarters of the two brigades composing his division. This numbered the 8th Chasseurs, 13th Dragoons, and 19th Cavalry, with the 15th, 23rd, 76th, and 103rd Regiments of foot; in all, twelve battalions.

It was apparent that the Austrians, whom the Archduke John was leading across the Inn, aimed at Munich, and Ney was given a covering position to bar the road through the Ebersberg pine-wood. Bounded on two sides by the waters of the Inn and the Iser, and not far from the village of Hohenlinden, it was there that the first shock was likely to be encountered. But it was devilish weather for armies to meet in, with alternate rain and snow-storms and nights of gripping frost followed by a thaw, till the roads gave like sponges under the passing weight of men and metal.

Having taken stock of the situation, Ney advanced his line to the higher ground of Ampfing; and with the fall of darkness on the evening of November 30th a sudden

sprinkling of fires, glowing above the whitened ridges of woodland, ruddily proclaimed the presence of the enemy opposite the main road that was the frontage of Ney's position. Shortly before dawn a survey from the outposts showed that the fires were flickering to a finish, which meant that the Austrians were on the move.

Ney's division, springing to arms on the icy ground, was first assailed by cavalry, followed by a vast impact of foot. It was soon clear that the column for which the French had waited was part of the main body and not a single detachment, and with his outposts driven in Ney was glad to regain the original shelter west of Hohenlinden. But his retirement was in good order, with the men confident that a few short hours would find them again in the frozen woodland, but this time face forward.

Now it was that Moreau showed what an eye he possessed for the ordering of a battle. The Archduke's army was moving in three columns, which pointed to as many directions of attack. But Moreau looked to the state of the ground, and finding that the best-conditioned road ran on the left of his standing he promptly marked it as the earliest and principal scene of engagement, as offering least resistance to the enemy's march. His forecast, which proved a correct one, led to Ney being stationed in readiness to fall on this first attacking column as it debouched from the highway.

The night of December 2nd again carried the reflection of bivouac fires to Ney's sentries, while for several hours shots were exchanged from the clumps of pine-wood. Midnight brought a lull, and the occasional fall of snow from loaded branches could be heard until five o'clock of the following morning (December 3rd), when 50,000 Austrians rattled forward. The total number of French to go into action was somewhat less, and of these, in keeping with Moreau's reckoning, Ney's force was the first to gain contact within an hour of the Archduke's disposition.

From his right, where the assault developed about six o'clock, the struggle became general. But Hohenlinden assumed its true character as a soldiers' battle when Ney led his own ranks forward against the attackers. Surging up the ridge in the face of a blinding snowstorm, leaving red tracks in the swiftly piling drifts, to a desperate chorus of the *Marseillaise* mingled with drums, gunfire, and crashing of felled trees, the French gave point, crowding down the farther slope with musket and bayonet before the Austrians had breath to rally, hauling cannon over the slushy surface and blasting lanes through the fugitives that were charged again on the left, to break finally in one overwhelming confusion of horse, foot, guns, and convoy still flayed by the victory-maddened pursuers.

It was all over, with their principal body churned into a mob-like disorder, before the Austrian supports had time to arrive on the scene. The French losses were 2,500, while, besides capturing 7,000 prisoners and a large haul of guns, they had inflicted double their own number of casualties. Altogether it was a great morning for the red-headed general, who realized at Hohenlinden his first vision of the perfect field where the changing tableaux included a frontal attack, a hand-to-hand mêlée, and his own sword leading the running.

With the signing of an armistice at Christmas Ney occupied the town of Burghausen, while on February 9th 1801 the Treaty of Lunéville brought a temporary peace to France and Austria. It was high time for the Emperor Francis, as, in addition to Hohenlinden, another of his armies had been set upon by Napoleon in his drive from the Lombard plains and crushed at Marengo.

In the middle of March the Army of the Rhine began its homeward swing, with Ney the richer by 10,000 francs for his services to a grateful Republic. He was given leave to break the journey, and travelled at quicker pace to La Petite Malgrange, where Papa Ney and sister Marguerite awaited his coming. There he was glad to

stretch his legs and pull off his boots; but the prime pleasure was to enlighten his father as to the new spirit that was giving fire to the French armies. Moreover, there was braid on his sleeve, and, by the grace of Bonaparte and with his own luck in the saddle, he meant to extend the plaiting of that decoration!

For the hussar had ridden a long way from the cooperage.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SUMMER OF THE CONSULATE

IN spite of the fact that he owed his rise to the great changes which had occurred in the country, General Ney, as a plain Republican soldier professing an almost classic reverence for his calling, was suspicious of the class of men, largely represented by politically minded lawyers, who had consolidated the Revolution. It was a principle of his creed that a soldier was more than a sword's breadth removed from the bias of the tribune, and his natural expression remained unaffected by the pseudo-Roman tricks of speech that passed as the essence of a patriot.

Moreover, he had never walked the boulevards or breathed the air of centralized Revolution that was Paris, while Napoleon was distant as an ascending star on a far-off horizon. But some time prior to the culminations of Hohenlinden and Lunéville, when Ney was still on the Rhine, things were pending in the doubtful world of politics that would call for the recognition of the blunt soldier while causing him no little anxiety.

France was experiencing one of those periodic waves of tiredness that may yet result in a new outburst of energy. It passed through soldier and civilian, and finally took form as a wholesale aversion levelled against the Directory. For the completion of the full circle of revolt was proclaiming it was good that one man should govern the people: one man who would be powerful enough to deal with an unsettled country and the combined powers of coalesced Europe that were gathering to try a new fall with democracy.

Michel Ney, like most soldiers, was ready to welcome a member of his own profession should he step forward in readiness for the work. But what of the candidates

and the high duties required of them? Who was commendable to those fickle hyper-critics who had marked their passing from the ribaldry of sansculottism to the raptures of the Directory with a mere change of clothing? He must be such a man, for instance, who had saved Toulon and blown discontent from the Paris streets by deftly handling a few guns; who had carried the three colours from Nice to within a long march of Vienna; and distended the same shadow of conquest upon the tall towers and poplars of Lombardy as on the Pyramids.

The discovery of such a being resulted in the *coup d'état* of 18th Brumaire (November 9th) 1799, by which Napoleon mastered France and when, in his own words, he led his friends from his doorstep to victory without having told them the object. And so the line of semaphores was set wagging across the spires and hill-tops that connected Paris with Strassburg, from which point it communicated to Ney in his Rhine quarters that the Legislature had fallen and Bonaparte was suprême in the capital.<sup>1</sup>

The general feeling was one of relief that the lawyers had at last been displaced by a soldier. But Ney had grown wise to the revolutionist habit of looking on the bright side of a leader, and waited for the man of Marengo to justify his consulship before applauding. There was some room for Republican scepticism, as the first moves in the establishment of a truly national situation were not reassuring.

To begin with, there was the newly imposed censorship of the Press, though that was mainly a military measure to safeguard public opinion during the coming warfare. A more popular grievance was the shutting down of the tribune, which was revered as the medium of common freedom. While orthodox priests were restored to benefices, hundreds of exiles returned, and nobles were admitted into the Senate.

Was it right, Ney argued, for individuals who had once been banished to be set in authority over those who

<sup>1</sup> See Note 1.



had framed their sentence? As for the emigrants, he had no patience with the laws that readmitted them to place and power in the country. He wanted some one to share his nervousness, and hit upon old Lefèbvre. But that honest blockhead could respond only to the language of children or soldiers, so Ney omitted all other considerations and simply asked whether the men of the Sambret-Meuse should become the prey of intriguers.

Now there was no more sincere Republican than ex-Sergeant-Major Lefèbvre. But even he struck a confident gesture on behalf of the First Consul, assuring Ney that his fears were entirely groundless. He appeared to know a thing or two, did Lefèbvre; and it was not all pretence, for Bonaparte had needed his sterling worth as a fighter on the day of Brumaire and twisted him round his finger, so that the big Alsatian had wept tears of sentiment and drawn his sword in the hall at St. Cloud without knowing what change he was helping forward. This made him all the more ready to instil belief into a brother soldier like Ney, who, without claim to political understanding, was vaguely alarmed for the ideals which had tempered the garish frenzy of '89.

But he, too, was shortly to feel the sway of the First Consul, who made provision for every type of grievance in his task of conciliating the people. The soldiers of the Rhine had envied the better and more glorious conditions prevailing on the Italian front. It was therefore Napoleon's business to invite some of their leaders to Paris, and express his admiration of the campaign which had ended at Hohenlinden. Thus it was that during the peace of Lunéville Ney began his acquaintance with Napoleon, and likewise Paris, in May 1801.

It was not long, his first visit to the capital; but he went back to La Petite Malgrange ready to swear by the institutions and state reforms of the new Government. The original concepts of democracy and political freedom had proved hopeless, and now there was nothing for it but to endorse the Constitution which stated as finale:

'Citizens, the Revolution is confined to the principles which commenced it. It is finished.'

To sum up in a popular maxim that characterized those halcyon days of the Consulate, the stage-coach could travel without a guard. But where were the phantoms of Camille, Jean-Paul, Maximilian, and George-Jacques? What of The Word of the Palais Royal?

Napoleon, however, wished to make doubly sure of Ney's attachment, and invited the help of Joséphine. It should be comparatively easy, thought the Creole, who, having already given Napoleon reason enough to divorce her, but still keeping him at her feet, knew that an inflexible bearing on the battlefield might easily turn to weakness in the boudoir. Medals and flattery were all very well, but as Madame Bonaparte, wife of the First Consul, she was aware of a more subtle persuasion.

In keeping with the almost regal dignity that justified the social value of her husband's sword, she was attended by an unofficial suite of young women who beautified her dinners and receptions. Joséphine passed the trained eye of a spoilt mistress over this assembly, and at last decided that a tall good-looking girl, with dark colouring and the light spirit of twenty summers, would succeed in tranquillizing Ney; and this where the expert opposition of half a hundred European generals, and the frozen depths of a Russian winter, should prove ineffectual.

The name of Madame Bonaparte's choice was Aglaé Louise Auguié, whose father and mother had graced the old régime in the respective offices of Receiver-General in the Finance Department, and lady-in-waiting to Marie Antoinette. They had experienced tragedy under the Terror, for, although M. Auguié just managed to escape the guillotine, his wife, in a fit of distraction brought about by news of the Queen's fate, had dashed herself to death from a window.

Mademoiselle Aglaé had come to swell Joséphine's train by reason of a schoolgirl friendship contracted with her daughter Hortense; while normally she and her father,

who had returned to the Ministry of Finance, kept home at Grignon in the vicinity of Versailles.

In the meantime Ney, never dreaming that his domestic future had already been settled, continued to enjoy the quiet of La Petite Malgrange till the last days of 1801. He was then appointed Inspector-General of Cavalry and called to Paris, where he looked forward to performing his regular business without enthusiasm.

It was the time when an expedition was being prepared to restore French authority in San Domingo, a move that Napoleon was to describe later as one of the greatest acts of folly he ever committed. Now the prospect of fighting negroes was more entertaining to General Ney than any routine inspectorship, so he applied for a transfer. This was granted on December 18th, but within a few hours he was asking the Minister of War to delay its confirmation till January.

The fact was that Joséphine, with a few adroit touches of her fan, had piloted the fiery but simple-souled hussar into the path of Mademoiselle Aglaé: and Ney had returned to his quarters thinking that he might be worse employed than superintending the mounts of the French Army. For one short period in his life he indulged the raptures of dreaming, his imagination called into being by the white rose odour of Malmaison. And on New Year's Day 1802 he scrapped the West Indian appointment, and sat down to his bureau at the War Office.

But he was reckoning without the refined perception of Aglaé, who had been told little more than that Ney had shown himself one of the best swords in the army. That was a good enough recommendation in those days, when the Sambre-et-Meuse and the spirit of '93 had already become a legend. Before meeting she had therefore fitted General Ney to a girlish standard of imaginary heroic appearance, her lively temperament conjuring up a truly aesthetic pattern of military virtue.

Now, as a man of thirty-three, Ney had acquired the set form and demeanour of an old-time soldier. The

young maidens who had grown up with the Directory could very well trim their skirts to the courtly measures which had come back in the once proscribed riot of luxury, the world of *salons* and banquets, gleaming equipages, brilliant smatters, and polite debauchery. But Ney made no attempt to harmonize with this courtier-like environment. He was, in fact, a being from another world, a world whose outer form had perished with the illusion of the Jacobins, but whose spirit was generating the new France. It was not for Aglaé to know that the pleasant screen of Consular manners was one of the concessions made by a cynical Napoleon to the more superficial of his subjects, while the real business was to convert the manhood of the country into an apostleship of iron.

And so she at first regarded poor Ney, with his queue and be-whiskered cheeks, his uneasy tongue and guileless remove from polite display or airy compliment, as little better than an exalted camp-boy. If this was a hero, rough and behind the times, lacking small-talk and with the gait of the stables, then the day-dreams of Mademoiselle Aglaé had gone adrift sadly. It was true that Michel Ney boasted only one refined accomplishment, and that was performing on the clarionet. But he was not so dense as to misread the frigid attitude of the finance official's daughter, which filled him with a still greater dislike for social circles and sparkling inanity.

Joséphine, however, with her womanly love of matchmaking, was not to be disappointed. She explained some of the drawbacks to Ney's comrades who, advancing the standpoint that Aglaé fully merited the sacrifice of his hair (even as an earlier Frenchman had rated Paris as well worth a Mass), persuaded him to part with his queue and whiskers. Ney therefore anticipated the total abolition of the pigtail throughout the army by two years, a measure that caused heartburning among the troops, who loved the decoration and sometimes used it as a receptacle for their precious money.

Meanwhile he was making the round of cavalry garrisons in the role of inspector; and three months after his first meeting with Aglaé he visited the Château at Grignon where, what with the advice of his friends and his now clean-shaven appearance, he gradually improved his chances of winning the girl's favour. By May things had sufficiently progressed to warrant a first proposal which, as custom demanded, was sent to M. Auguié, to whom Joséphine also forwarded a letter of commendation. Within a few days the proposal was accepted, and on July 27th their marriage contract was drawn up in Paris.

Ney's settlement included the country house near Nancy, valued at 80,000 francs, and 12,000 francs in actual money. This was comparatively little for one who had led the march of a Republican army at a time when baggage trains of loot were not unknown to the general officer; while he accompanied his first little gift of jewellery with a proud explanation, to the effect that it was neither pearls nor diamonds since a soldier's sword was not for the purchasing of gain, but glory.

The chapel of the château at Grignon had fallen into the usual state of neglect under the Revolution. It was now restored for the marriage ceremony on August 5th under the professional direction of the artist Isabey, who saw to the massing of flowers, foliage, and wax lights down the aisles and in suspension from the roof, with a military band performing in the music gallery. General Ney wore his splendid full parade uniform and a jewelled sword which had been brought from Aboukir by the First Consul. He had no scruples against appearing in military state; but the homely casting of his character was shown by the attendance of an old peasant couple from the village, who were celebrating their golden wedding in the French fashion of renewal, and had been dressed for the occasion by the younger lovers.

"These old people," said Ney, revealing that his sentiments were untouched by the wearing of epaulettes and

Napoleon's costly present, 'will remind me of the meanness of my own origin.' He also trusted that their company at the altar, as witness to a long union, would prove of happy augury for his own.

Long union? The old shepherd and his wife were bathed in the memories of half a century as they stood beside the more radiant couple, in the warm glow cast by the garlanded branches of hanging light. While thirteen years were remaining for Michel Ney.

The events of that day passed into the rustic gossip of Grignon. How, as twilight wore on, the guests mingled with local farmer and peasant in the château gardens, where a play was enacted on a little stage in the open air; how Ney and his bride were led by a gesticulating old crone into the hut of a fortune-teller, where they laughed over the usual frothy assurances as to the future, but still more over the sudden unmasking of the two old women as none other than Isabey and the popular Madame Campan, who was related to Aglaé; how a choir of peasant girls chanted the unfulfilled ascription of long life and happiness; how the band broke into a dance strain, and Ney led the first quadrille with the shepherd's wife while Aglaé was conducted by the old peasant; how darkness, closing upon the background of trees, brought to light a number of transparencies that glimmered with the names of battles where Ney had been distinguished, as though to outshine the revelry with reminders that they were also a people with a creed and frontier to safeguard; while midnight brought the fête to an end with a shower of fireworks.

Such happenings are too full with the scent of summer to reflect their rightful place in the Napoleonic adventure. It was as though a masque had slipped into view from an earlier day, when Louis XIV and his sumptuous circle inspired the brilliance of Watteau and Fragonard, or shadowy pastorals were played out under the green half-light of Fontainebleau. But France was resting between the period of Revolution and that of the Great Wars,

and in the strangeness of an imperilled silence the world seemed young again.

After a short stay at Grignon Ney and his wife removed to La Petite Malgrange. He had given up the inspectorship and looked forward to a spell of peaceful existence in the country. But it was not to be. Events were moving in Switzerland that called for the intervention of France, and on September 29th Ney was ordered to Geneva. He left La Petite Malgrange on October 1st, arriving at his Swiss destination three days later.

The Republican theory had led to a culmination of the age-long trouble which marked the various governments in Switzerland. Acting on its encouragement the people of Vaud had challenged the Berne oligarchy and called for French assistance, which was granted. In 1798 an army under Brune overthrew the central cantons (and incidentally emptied the Swiss treasury), after which the old federation had been replaced by a new Helvetian Republic, founded on Jacobin lines, while Geneva was incorporated with France. This was the first taste of foreign authority in Switzerland, and after several abortive beginnings a counter-revolution, led by General Bachmann, succeeded in driving the new Government from Berne. It was in answer to another request for Napoleon to restore order that Ney was summoned, his choice being dictated by the fact that he spoke German as well as French.

On October 21st, after waiting for the report of a mission sent to the refugee Government at Lausanne, Ney was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary to Switzerland and commandant of any troops that might eventually occupy the cantons. Within a few hours, acting on the instructions of Talleyrand, Minister of Foreign Affairs, he set out for Berne, and rested at Moudon where he took stock of the situation.

While leaving little doubt that he meant to enforce his terms if necessary, Napoleon had suggested a conference with Helvetian representatives in Paris. It was

Ney's business, therefore, to avoid all appearances of a foreign military nature as far as possible and keep the proposals open, also disclaiming the empty rumour that Napoleon had designs upon the Presidency of the Helvetian Republic. Meanwhile, encouraged by the knowledge of these French preparations, the Republican Government was again meeting in Berne, though the patriot troops of the Confederate body were still under arms.

Ney, seeing that it was no time for half-measures, made an energetic beginning. He sent a report to Paris from Berne, where he arrived on the 23rd, containing his plans for holding the troubled district with twelve infantry battalions, six squadrons of cavalry, and twelve guns. But without waiting for an answer he ordered the dissolution of the local Government, backing his authority by armed displays at Berne, Thun, Freiburg, Solothun, and Basle, while ordering General Seras, who commanded at Geneva, to move against a concentration of patriot levies at Zurich.

For the most part these were roughly armed peasant insurgents, and after a peaceful parade of the force under Seras, and a hurried visit by Ney, order was restored in the city. But the local Diet still continued in office, while reports during the first week of November were responsible for Ney having some of the leading Confederates held in custody. This, together with the tidings that French troops were moving down the Alpine passes to complete the investment, finally broke the patriots, who before the end of the month were dispatching delegates to treat with Napoleon in Paris. The result of their visit was the signing of a Decree of Mediation on February 19th 1803.

Ney's ministry was then concerned with the transfer of government from Berne to Freiburg, and the appointment of D'Affry as President of the Helvetian Republic; while he also obtained a vote for 625,000 francs, in keeping with Napoleon's dictum that troops must be



paid by the inhabitants of the country demanding their employment.

But the course of these arrangements was interrupted on the night of March 25th by a sudden outbreak of mutiny among the Helvetian regiments stationed at Berne. Ney's men took over the situation and drove the mutineers back to quarters, but not before a French non-commissioned officer had been killed; to which Ney replied by shooting one of the leaders of the trouble and imprisoning four others.

Meanwhile, family affairs were demanding his return to Paris, for which he obtained leave at the end of March. On May 8th Aglaé presented him with the eldest of their four sons, who was christened Joseph Napoleon, from the fact of the First Consul and his brother standing as godparents. The other additions to Ney's family were Michel Aloys, who followed in 1804, Eugène, and Napoleon Henri Edgar, who saw the light when his father was preparing to win immortality in Russia.

Ney was back in Switzerland in time for the opening of the new Diet at Freiburg on July 4th. The speech he made on that occasion marked a very near sailing to the wind of compromise for one of Ney's staunchness, reflecting the current references to a deep calm following the tempest of revolution and to the 18th Brumaire as the morning of a new day for France. He reminded them that the future of Switzerland depended upon their recognition of Napoleon as the one central hope of the time, and that upon such terms France was willing to grant them a concrete friendship.

The same utterances, in alternate French and German, and as nearly pompous as Ney's direct vigour could sanction, had sounded before the Helvetian Senate at Berne and the various deputations he had encountered during his mission. 'It is not the keys of your gates I demand,' he had said to one of these, 'my cannon can force them. But bring me hearts full of submission, that are worthy of the friendship of France.' The apparent

gulf dividing this spokesman of the Republic from the rugged hussar who had literally sworn down a succession of strongholds was a heartfelt reaction against the excesses of the Revolution. For a new sentiment had risen in favour of social order and prosperity, and for healing to follow the making of national wounds. But was this an utter negation of Revolutionary principles, or their logical outcome? Did a tremor of satisfaction pass through the ghosts of the great tribunes in their shadowy hall, or were lips still framing the immemorial whisper: 'We are betrayed'?

The negotiations were brought to an end by treaty in September, and with the signing of the last document Ney was informed, through Talleyrand, of the First Consul's complete satisfaction with his work as diplomatist. A secondary feature of Ney's office in Switzerland had been the commencement of several new highways about the country, which, he had pointed out to the deputies who questioned the project, would greatly improve trade. But the traffic he had in mind was that of men and guns, while any gain would accrue to Bonaparte, who needed a military path over the Simplon. So it was that when a fresh map of the cantons was thought necessary the work was entrusted to military engineers of the French service.

There is no doubt that during this period Ney was a capable envoy. France had the settlement of her authority in the Helvetian Republic, Napoleon the realization of a secret design, and Ney himself the gift of a gold snuff-box set with diamonds, to bear out the advantage of his mission. While, although it had been no woman's business, Madame Ney received a benefit when, together with her son, father, and sister she visited Freiburg.

As wife to the successful general she was fêted by local society, and since she was developing a keen sense of pleasure, which seemed to increase in proportion with her husband's honours, she was able to indulge that side

of her character and reflect that she had not done so badly, after all, by marrying into the hell-for-leather *élite* of the Sambre-et-Meuse and the Rhine Army.

This careless time came to an end on January 5th 1804, when Ney and his family started for Paris, arriving there on the 9th. There was no sign of regret on Ney's part at giving up diplomacy for the battle and the bivouac, the line of defence and the flying column. And if his blood tingled expectantly there was good reason. For he was soon to trace that 'pirouette into Germany', by which light term its commander described the many deathless routes that made up a march of the Grand Army.

## CHAPTER V

### THE GREAT BATTLES

AFTER refusing to evacuate Malta, in keeping with an earlier treaty, and continuing to open her purse for the benefit of every power at variance with the Republic, Great Britain declared war on France in May 1803. This convinced Napoleon that it was high time to show his enemies how far the days of Pompadour and Du Barry were superseded; and so began the construction of an army to demonstrate the meaning of his words before Europe.

Since its goal was England, the parade-ground of this mighty invading force was the length of Channel from Brest, through Wimereux, Boulogne, and Ostend, to Hanover, a panoramic masterpiece of man-power, morale, and equipment to the tune of 190,000 bayonets and sabres, under General Soult; while Ney was sent north and given command of the 6th Army Corps which, although dotted about Étapes and the banks of the Canche, occupied what was known as the Camp of Montreuil from the town where Ney had his quarters.

The strength of the 6th Corps (about 25,000 men) was divided among three infantry divisions and a brigade of cavalry. Wooden huts, roughly furnished with tables, benches, racks, and hurdle bedsteads, were built to accommodate the troops, and these camps soon developed into practical townships where barrack-like requirements mingled with theatres and concert-rooms; while gardens and lines of shrubbery intersected the streets, which were named after prominent soldiers who had died under the tricolour.

Equally gigantic preparations were made for the actual crossing. A number of light pinnaces were to lead off with the advance detachments, the main body following

in flat-bottomed boats, with heavy material borne on barges in the rear. Without approaching the moot point as to whether Napoleon made these plans in earnest, or merely as a ruse to cover the direction of his next sweep, the obstacles in the way of their execution will be readily apparent.

It is true that a time of very protracted calm would have left the British Fleet helpless, while the boats could have been rowed across the Channel. But failing this, the French would have to control that narrow sea, as more than one tide was needed before their numerous armament could have cleared the harbours, which also meant that isolated flotillas would be at the mercy of the waiting cruisers. In any case it presupposed the defeat, or, at least, the hoodwinking, of Nelson; and in spite of the many miracles effected by the Revolution it failed to inspire a seaman of the first order.

Ney settled down to drilling and parading the 6th Corps with his usual seriousness. Sometimes a signal would be given and the men marched shoreward to the boats, where they practised the art of acquiring the most comfort in a minimum of time and space. It was, on the whole, an easy-going period for the men of the coming Grand Army. Now and again the English gunboats would dash to within range of the twenty-pounders on the coastal batteries, or a spy scare would set the camps in motion.

The greatest of these alarms reached Ney in a report that the enemy had stranded bales of plague-infected cotton upon the shore, and every one was ordered to give these suspicious-looking masses a wide berth. Before long the rumour filtered to Paris, and Ney was asked to hold a proper examination. It led to the unmasking of these 'bales' as the remnants of old hammocks washed up from a foundered vessel.

But Ney encountered a far more costly pastime with the arrival of a plausible-tongued adventurer at his headquarters, who claimed to have invented a new type of

balloon for scouting. Ney was sufficiently enthralled by the idea to advance 30,000 francs for its completion, but when next he sought the inventor he could not be found within a long march of Montreuil; which goes to prove that Ney's early business experience had not been effective.

Madame Ney was naturally in evidence at Montreuil, and later at Recque, when her husband shifted his quarters farther inland. It was not too far for the butterflies to venture from Paris, and very soon the womenfolk of the higher officers were indulging their usual round of fêtes and entertainment as a kind of courtly appendage to the sparkling preparations along the Channel. But the perfect discipline of the various corps remained unbroken, while nothing more serious than a form of itch blotted their health record. Each day the men performed their turn of service, while at night a ponderous chain was drawn across the harbour and guards walked the quays, exchanging their 'Sentinels, attention!' with the 'Good watch' of the sailors in the tops.

The entire scene of that concentration, with its unity and spirit, its colour and abundance of talent, was yet to fade until it remains no more than a problem of history. Indeed, its most active reminder, if the Boulogne fishermen speak sooth, is that several of those flat-bottomed boats are included among their herring-fleet of to-day.

The army took part in the discussions that led to the proclamation of the Empire on May 18th 1804. A fortnight earlier the Senate had declared: 'That the interests of the French people will be greatly promoted by confiding the government of the Republic to Napoleon Bonaparte, as hereditary Emperor,' and the soldiers had given their approval by subscribing to loyal addresses.

Following as it did upon the absolutism of the Consulate there was nothing startlingly drastic in Napoleon's resolve to end the Revolution by the establishment of heredity; and Ney drew up the usual type of rambling

epistle that embodied the felicitations of the 6th Corps, and joined his artillery to that of the surrounding camps in thundering for the birth of the Empire.

Few plebiscites have been more convincing than that by which the people of France invited Napoleon to assume Imperial dignity. There were naturally a few intractables who, unlike the barrel-cooper's son, could not associate a crown with their thoughts of a still cherished Republic, but most of these surrendered in time to purple tokens.

Such was Colonel Mouton, who ordered the ranks to be silent when they broke into cheers for the newly decreed title of Emperor of the French; his Jacobin tendencies were soon quietened by the gift of a staff appointment. But there was one pure genius whom nothing could win over. The news reached him in Vienna, where he replaced the original dedication of his symphony, the 'Eroica', which had been to Napoleon, by a single phrase in witness of the essential harmony that was Beethoven: 'To the memory of a great man.'

The next step was to create an aristocracy of the sword, and in such a way that the military members of the old and new systems would be brought together. This was effected on May 19th by an order restoring the dignity of Marshal of France, which had been abolished in the sanguine days of 1793. Now, within a few hours of the Empire's inauguration, by a few strokes of the pen and additional trimmings, eighteen generals were raised simultaneously to the Marshalate.

Four of these, Kellermann, Lefèbvre, Pérignon, and Sérurier were veterans given honorary title in order to add a discreet touch of Republican salt to the grading of the Empire. The active promotions numbered Berthier (who, at fifty-one, was the oldest), Murat, Moncey, Jourdan, Masséna, Augereau, Bernadotte, Soult, Brune, Lannes, Mortier, Ney (who was then thirty-five), Davout (the youngest, aged thirty-four), and Bessières. This list was increased later on by the names of Victor,

Macdonald, Marmont, Oudinot, Suchet, St. Cyr, Poniatowski, and Grouchy.

Under this new ordering Ney received a yearly income of 60,000 francs, one-third of which derived from his decoration of the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour. The Order of the Christ of Portugal also went with the elevation, while more resounding titles were to be added during the years of warfare. With the awardment of rank, income, and property, Napoleon aimed at the substitution of a happy medium in the social order, which should be an equal remove from the shoddiness of the sansculottes and the gross prodigality of the old régime. And it is wholly to Ney's credit that he was never one to upset this unity of idea by grasping or personal ambition. He took the baton with the same pride of soldierly distinction that he had felt as one of the riders in his first squadron.

It was next arranged that crosses of the Legion of Honour should be distributed among the various corps, Ney's command being favoured to the number of 207. This was well enough, argued the men, but how much better if Napoleon visited the camp and awarded the crosses in person. The complaint reached Ney, who, recognizing the appeal it would have for Napoleon, wrote to Paris on July 25th expressing the popular viewpoint; which was answered by Napoleon's promise to officiate at a military ceremony held at Boulogne on August 15th.

It was a day of splendid summer, unclouded, but with just enough breeze to ruffle the haze of heat. Napoleon took his place on a platform fronting the sea, overlooking a massed crescent of troops while the boats rocked at anchor beyond them. A flutter of flags extended from town to beach, with a whitely nebulous decoration revealing the sails of watchful English cruisers nearer the skyline. They may have brought memories to the figure on the platform of a certain disastrous day off the shore of Aboukir. But such things passed as the officers and men filed by to receive their crosses, the



sound of bands alternating with that of cannon, while the troops cheered, waving their swords and bayonets, after which the whole great assembly was dedicated to the service of France and its Government. The echoes, travelling far on the breeze, provoked the cruisers to stand in shoreward, while a string of French gunboats responded by bearing up from the south. There was no fighting, however, and the only firing heard that day was in salutation.

In the evening Ney attended a banquet that was held for the Emperor and his Marshals. The troops were given extra rations and an allowance of wine, and, when it was dark, fireworks illumined the bay and probably increased speculation among the cruisers. The Army of England, as the Channel host was called, had paraded in honour of the Empire; and next day its camp life was resumed.

This was the period when Ney revealed another aspect of his thoroughness. There was a Swiss officer, Jomini, serving on his staff, who had written a learned work on military tactics, and Ney sat down to show what he could do in the same department. The result was some high-pitched redundant essays on the methods of handling horse, foot, and guns, which Ney amplified by holding a series of officers' conferences during the winter. The impetuous Marshal is not usually associated with study, but there was nothing he would not venture for the prospect of military glory.

The coronation ceremony on December 2nd brought the Marshals flocking into Paris. Those who, like Ney, had no official part, joined the spectators in the nave and galleries of Notre-Dame, and with their tongues in cheek surveyed the spilling of the 'little phial' whose sacred import carried a great soldier to the throne, that 'piece of wood covered with satin'. But while this was so much tedious mummary, the doubtful pleasure of shining at the fêtes that followed was positively blemished for the Marshals by the fact that they were called upon

to share the expenses between them. Ney was genuinely relieved to pack up and go north again some time in February.

During the next few weeks there were signs that Napoleon at last meant business in the Channel. Plans were drawn up for warships to cover the crossing, while the various divisions underwent extra training in going aboard and disembarking from the boats. Eight hours of darkness, it had been said, would decide the fate of the universe; and with the Emperor's arrival at Boulogne the time seemed imminent.

On March 21st Ney received definite instructions for the embarking of his corps. Transports were drawn into line on both sides of the Canche, with allotted places for man, horse, and impedimenta, while three guns were to signal the different stages of the movement. One—and mounted officers left the saddle and stood to their stations, as the men unfixed bayonets. Two—and the parallel columns, head-on to the boats, were ready to pace forward. Three—and a volume of cheers rang along the flotilla as the units boarded.

It was a perfectly simple operation of the Napoleonic stamp, and was carried out in ten and a half minutes. Only a ditch divided them from the English shore, where signs of life were to be picked out on a clear day from the heights of Ambleteuse. But at that point the firing of a fourth and unexpected gun gave the order to go ashore again, which the disappointed men obeyed somewhat more slowly by adding an extra two and a half minutes to their boarding schedule.

It was all over. The French Fleet, far from moving up to effect a combination in the Channel, was riding off Cadiz. In addition, England was acting as purse for another coalition with Russia, Austria, Sweden, and Naples, which meant that Allied armies were gathering at Vienna and entering south Germany.

It was a case of the sea, as Napoleon expressed it, having to be subdued by the land; and the August days

of 1805 witnessed the transformation of the Army of England into the seven corps of the Grand Army under Bernadotte, Marmont, Davout, Soult, Lannes, Ney, and Augereau, with Bessières leading the Imperial Guard and Murat the cavalry. The order to sweep across the Rhine was fulfilled at an average rate of sixteen miles between sunrise and sunset, in perfect order and alignment through France, Holland, and Germany, for the mingled inducement of five francs a day and the honour of appearing as the 'advance-guard of the Great People'.

Ney received his instructions on August 27th. Four days later the 6th Corps broke camp, with Tilly at the head of the horse, Dupont commanding the 1st and Loison the 2nd Divisions. The 3rd, under Mahler, followed in the rear. Its total strength of over 20,000 comprised twenty-four battalions which were grouped into six infantry brigades, and three cavalry regiments, the 1st and 3rd Hussars and 10th Chasseurs. Thirty-six guns (a small but normal complement for those days) rattled alongside. While forty paces ahead of the frontal file went Marshal Ney, riding full into the years of victory.

With the arrival of marching orders he had made a sudden visit to Paris, and picked up his command again at St. Dizier. All along the route leave was granted to every man whose home was in reasonable distance, and such was the spirit of the march, and so potent the bugles, that there was not a single gap in the ranks on approaching the frontier. The commissariat arrangements provided for the orderly exchanging of food and receipts, the latter being converted into money by local authorities. It was all very regular and efficient, so that in little over three weeks after leaving their coastal billets the horses of Ney's corps were nosing the Rhine at Seltz and Lauterbourg.

The concentration was effected with the left and right flanks of the Grand Army resting on Strassburg and Mayence. An Austrian force under Mack was holding

the line of the Iller, and Napoleon, instead of making a straightforward march in keeping with old-time strategy and the anticipations of General Mack, intended a sudden swoop to the crossings of the Danube beyond Ulm (marking the enemy's right), that would carry him athwart their lines of communication.

On arriving at Seltz Ney discovered, contrary to report, that a bridge was not in readiness for the crossing. He chose a position facing some islands in broad stream, barges, boats, and timber were strung together, and after a halt of fifteen hours, on September 27th, the 6th Corps went swinging across the Rhine.

Ney, mounted in state on the right bank amid his staff, received the cheers of the passing columns. Every one was in high spirits, the troops tearing down sprays of oak as they took up the march again and fastening a few leaves in cap or tunic. Before dusk the leading division had grounded arms in Carlsruhe, and still driving on like a multiform cloud of horse, foot, and guns the whole of Ney's command was quartered about Stuttgart by September 30th.

He had lost nothing by halting at Seltz. Some of the more extended divisions needed an extra day or so for their concentration, and it was October 3rd when the great march to cut the Austrian lines of supply and retreat led southward. Ney was approaching familiar ground in country which marked the fringes of the Hohenlinden operations. He was on the extreme right, and therefore the point from which the perfect wheeling movement was executed as the various corps, like the folds of a steadily decreasing fan, drew closer. It was a masterpiece of staff work and organization, with four hundred miles of roadway rolled up behind the thousands of men and masses of material as neatly as an hour's walk. While all the time old Mack was blinking westward, riveted by a deceptive cavalry belt on the edge of the Black Forest.

But the invaders, without losing a sense of victory,

had long since discarded their garlands. The weather had turned cold, with drenching rain and snow that melted in such quantities as to flood the passage. Ney's transport broke down and, despite his efforts to maintain order, the starving men looted some of the way that carried them to the Leipheim and Guntzburg approaches.

An attack was ordered at both points, but as Leipheim roads were impassable the main assault centred on Guntzburg. Here the first of two bridges crossing into the town had been destroyed, and although the French, occupying some land midway, worked hard to repair it, they were driven off. But the bayonets of the 59th Infantry were more effective on the lower structure, and October 10th found Ney in possession of the town.

Five days earlier Mack had awakened from his dream, and found the enemy moving on his position from the north-west. It seemed more startling than true, but he dropped a feeler in the direction of Guntzburg and was promptly made aware of Ney's presence. So back he went towards Ulm.

In accordance with this Ney was ordered to consider himself under Murat, whose cavalry, with the 5th Corps of Lannes, was nearing Ulm by the south bank. Ney's grumbling acknowledgment found a ready sympathizer in Lannes, as, although both men would have given the palm for cavalry leading to Murat, his generalship was another question. What was more, he had married Caroline Bonaparte, and the Emperor was known to be subject to family feeling. The little Gascon and the red-headed Lorrainer were equally sick at being responsible to a *beau sabreur* with such debatable references.

They were soon at loggerheads. Murat ordered Ney to string his corps along the south bank of the Danube, and Ney replied that an unguarded north bank would offer a possible way out to the Austrians, who could then move eastward. Lannes backed him up at head-quarters, and Murat so far gave in as to say that Dupont's 1st Division need not be brought over. But this was not

good enough for Ney, who continued to argue the weakness of such a position and finally spread his maps in the effort to convince Murat. 'I don't understand you,' the latter told them. 'It is my way to plan in the presence of the enemy'; and he gave them his back.

This, as they had feared, was the style of a horseman and not of a general. But as he happened to be senior, the 1st Division of Ney's corps was left alone on the south bank, and on the 11th the Austrians, apprised of the blunder, came down in force. The isolated brigades put up a splendid fight under Dupont, and Mack, thinking he had engaged a main body, was glad to hold off in readiness for a retirement into Bohemia.

The situation had not been lost upon Napoleon, who visited Murat's head-quarters on the 13th and censured Ney for having exposed part of his corps to danger. But for once in a while Ney was ready to bear the injustice without murmuring, and accepted the next part of Napoleon's scheme as a chance of restoring the failure. The Austrians were holding a position set between woodland and the village of Elchingen. Being driven from this they could only retreat upon Ulm, and thus lead up to Napoleon's plan for crowning the campaign by an encircling movement.

The task of clearing the plateau was entrusted to Ney, who was early at work soon after sunrise on the 14th. His artillery opened to cover the pioneers of Loison's division as they strengthened the bridge, while the infantry massed bayonets for attack. When all was ready, Ney saluted the Emperor and was given his final orders. Murat was horsed beside Napoleon as the Marshal who was to lead the field cantered by, in full dress starry with decorations; and before quitting earshot he turned to Murat: 'Come with me, Prince, and make your plans in the presence of the enemy!' With that he set spur and galloped, like a man inspired, to wipe out the unjust reproach he had swallowed or die at the head of his columns.

With cannon-balls ploughing up the water that reached to his horse's belly, he went over in advance of the 6th Light Infantry. There was no easy yielding among the Austrians that day, and several attacks were needed before, soon after noon, they commenced retiring. More than one of these scrambling onslaughts had been led by the Marshal in person, who displayed the rough-and-ready verve of a company officer and was among the first to wave a sword in the street of Elchingen. It was a great triumph for Ney and his 6th Corps, with the Austrians sent flying to their fate in the marked centre of Ulm.

This was foremost in the Emperor's mind a year or two later, when he inaugurated patents of nobility with titles derived from a province or battle where the recipient had been distinguished. Ney was honoured as the Duke of Elchingen, which only needs to be repeated in order to convince one that these dukedoms were among the most transient Napoleonic creations. For who now associates Ney with such a title, or would recognize Lannes as Duke of Montebello or Davout as Duke of Auerstädt?

Twenty-four hours later Ney had united with the 5th Corps in taking up the pursuit. Part of the Austrians streamed away in total disorder, while Mack and his remnants completed the French plan by making for the shelter of Ulm, with Lannes pounding the left of their retreat and Ney on the right. The 15th saw a dashing attack by Ney on the heights of Michelbert, north of the position, which, breaking through the skeleton defence, was the last move in the closure.

Negotiations lasted a few days when, owing to a change in the weather, the French endured agonies of discomfort. Ney's corps had been on the march, between spells of fighting, since the morning of Elchingen, and had, moreover, gone with tightened belts as rations were still a problem. There was now a chance of resting before Ulm, but it found them exposed to such cold and rainstorms that the very rudiments of discipline were

abandoned. Fires could not be kept and sentries were washed from their posts: even the sacred artillery parks were left deserted.

Such was the intense wretchedness of a night when Napoleon sent one of his staff with a call for the Austrians to surrender. But it was necessary to rouse them, and men splashed through the mud and water seeking a trumpeter, who was at last hauled from under a wagon, stiff and half-drowned in the quagmire, with blue lips that could barely trouble the mouthpiece.

A reply came that the garrison would consider terms, which reached Ney in the shape of a request for the Austrians to march out, still bearing arms, and join up with their scattered units. Failing this, they would bury themselves under the ruins—at least, so ran the ultimatum. But Ney was too good a bluffer himself to be impressed by the same practice in others, and reminded Mack that his state was hopeless beyond the point of forcing a bargain. He cut short the next approach to a concession by threatening to storm the place on the 17th, and the Austrians, after a final hopeless gesture to French head-quarters, marched out as prisoners on the 20th.

The weather made a sudden clearance in time for the handing over, which thawed the French into cheering Napoleon who, it was being repeated, conducted war with legs instead of arms. But there was no rift in the clouds for the Austrian commander, who gave up his sword with the announcement: 'Here is the unfortunate Mack.'

That burst of brilliance, however, was an illusory reflection of the state of the victors, which was typified by the mustering of Ney's corps at Ulm on the 26th. While the main body continued its march on Vienna, Ney was to invade the Tyrol and reach Innsbruck, with a total strength that now fell short of 10,000. For the theory of concentration, however masterly and effective its performance, was apt to increase the difficulty of supplies, more than one corps being detailed to exhaust



the same means of requisition. This meant that hunger combined with the effects of long marches in filling the hospitals, while plundering became more frequent. Neither was it always politic for the higher ranks to enforce authority, since starving soldiers of even the Grand Army were not a far remove from the desperate. It was better to give them their fill of fighting, and trust that to-morrow's route would fend for the knapsack.

Ney was faced with the new prospect of mountain warfare, and his study of the ground to be covered led to the introduction of a force which spread later through every division of the French Army. This was the attachment of a light infantry company, especially accoutred for climbing, to each battalion. And when he opened hostilities at the Pass of Schernitz on November 4th the utility of these lightly loaded men was readily apparent. Two forts covered the entrance, with peasants lining the slopes and rolling fragments of rock as the attackers, clinging to chance growths and driving a bayonet hold into crevices, mounted the narrow pathways. Surprise and daring made up for the rank exposure of such a system, and Innsbruck was taken on the 5th.

Whilst there Ney was able to wipe off an old score incurred by the 76th Regiment during its service in the Tyrol six years earlier. Two of its colours which had then been captured were found again in the arsenal, and the Marshal, calling a grand parade, restored the trophies to the head of the regiment. Of a truth, reflected those sons of the Revolution, enormities were being corrected.

With the occupation of the Brenner, which was carried out by Loison's 2nd Division a week later, Ney's part in the Tyrol was practically ended. There were frequent skirmishes which, indecisive as operations, prevented him from sharing the glory of that flush which broke over the Carpathian hills as the immortal Sun of Austerlitz on December 2nd. From that day's destruction of the Austrian and Muscovite forces ('which English gold had brought from the ends of the earth', in the phrase

of Napoleon), the Grand Army swept on to enjoy its promised Mardi Gras at Vienna. And Ney's corps, after re-forming at Innsbruck on December 4th, rallied to the concentration at Judenburg, some twenty miles from the Austrian capital.

Napoleon greeted Ney at the palace of Schönbrunn, with all the warmth of a victor whose sword had cut through the old foundations of a continent. The Peace of Pressburg followed on December 26th, which left the Emperor Francis with no alternative but to retire from the game for the time being. As for the Russian Alexander, his thought was hazy with dreams of an ideally free and blissful Europe, which, for tenacity of danger, was only matched by the moneyed nervousness of Great Britain. But to this point the war had been finished, and with Napoleon's predicted clap of thunder.

Ney began his homeward march by way of Salzburg, then on to the Lake of Constance. When next he followed the trail of his wife into the Paris *salons* it was as the hero of Elchingen, whose secondary stars included Ulm and the Tyrol. It was regrettable that the glow of Austerlitz had been denied him, but the deep-rooted enmity towards the France of Napoleon was by no means exhausted, and the summer of 1806 found a new power in line with the Coalition.

That was the Prussia of Frederick William III, or, more precisely, of Queen Louisa, whose charming appearance and Amazonian qualities dominated the war party. But the Prussian military machine was far from perfect, and the unknown power of the Tsar was counted upon as an abiding and inexhaustible background to a struggle with Napoleon. So it was that the Prussian king and Alexander I stood by torchlight over the dark tomb of Frederick the Great, where they bound themselves together by an oath-taking as solemn as the scene was eerie.

Louisa explained that war had been decided on 'by the sentiment of honour'; and members of the Prussian Noble

Guard, emulated by the associations of Frederick's sword on its marble slab in Potsdam, and a stone memorial to the French defeat at Rossbach in 1757, whetted their blades on the steps of Napoleon's embassy in Berlin. The Duke of Brunswick and Prince Hohenlohe took the field, and from the wooded heights of Thuringia faced down upon the French positions in south Germany.

This sabre-rattling had led to the recall of Marshal Ney, who joined his command at Nuremburg. There were two divisions, the 1st under Marchant, while Mahler, and later Marcognet, led the 2nd. Gay young Colbert rode at the head of a cavalry brigade, comprising the 3rd Hussars and 10th Chasseurs. The formation of Ney's corps had scarcely altered since the days of that earlier summer when it had marched inland, with a vision of white cliffs that were never to be attempted receding in the background. Most of the men could recollect comrades who were no more present in the ranks. But so long as it was known that such a François had fallen at Elchingen, or a Pierre in the Tyrol, the corps was at nearly double its visible strength. For their spirits held to the marchers.

Once again the Grand Army was moving in perfect pattern of planning and alignment. The original space from column to column was a day's march, with an extremity of sixty miles dividing the left wing of Lannes and Augereau from Soult and Ney on the right, the centre being held by Bernadotte, Davout, and the Guard. But gradually, as striking distance approached, the lines of march converged, till barely twenty miles marked their square battle-order frontage. This was an exhibition of the staff wizardry that turned campaigns from the inside of a travelling coach, with the troops maintaining a daily minimum of eighteen miles head-on to a fleeting October brilliance.

Ney's 6th Corps, which followed Soult's command on the right, was soon experiencing the usual drawback of massed concentration. For Soult's men got the pickings

of every village and food-centre through which that flank of the army passed, a state of affairs that rankled until the 13th, when Ney was veered to the left in the direction of Jena. There it was that the Prussians, after aimless marches and long councils distracted by contrary reports of the French advance, had massed in two bodies for launching at the nearest wing. But the choice of attack was not to rest with Hohenlohe.

The heights above Jena, where Napoleon had his quarters, had been occupied by Lannes, who with the Emperor, Ney, and Berthier made a survey of the Prussian position. It was near moonrise on the 13th, shots were passing between the outposts, the reflection of watch-fires and burning houses glared in the sky. Orders went to and fro with the rocking of a lantern. Here was a track that must be extended into a road before daylight, there were guns to be mounted, and reinforcements to be hurried north and westward. But Ney, who had pushed on ahead, was anxiously waiting the arrival of his corps. He sniffed battle, and was afoot by two o'clock the next morning when a fog increased the darkness of early hours.

The presence of the Guard betokened a hot quarter, and Ney took his stand near the Bearskins. He saw the sun rise, wide and luminous over the plateau and leaving only mist in the valleys. The battle music was attaining crescendo, but it had gone nine when Colbert, with a mixed force of cavalry, grenadiers, and light infantry, under 3,000 in all, appeared through the turmoil. The bulk of the 6th Corps was some hours behind on the road, and it was good luck that even Colbert and the advance-guard had caught up with the Marshal.

By this time Lannes, fighting in the centre with Soult on his right, had succeeded in clearing the eminence. The original plan had been for Ney to attack between these two corps, but under the circumstances Napoleon sent an order that he was not to move without reinforcements. Here was another check for the impetuous

Marshal, who had been at fever-heat for an eternity on that morning of battle. A thousand Deaths and Furies hurtled through his brain as he turned on the staff officer who brought the message: 'Tell the Emperor that I share glory with no one.' With that he rushed his vanguard into the line, at the nearest and *wrong* part between Lannes and Augereau, even going so far to the left-centre of the Prussians that neither could support him.

The audacious few swept over an artillery section, only to recoil from the weight of heavy cavalry. A counter-attack by their own horse relieved the pressure, but with new waves bearing down upon them Ney formed his infantry into square, grimly remarking to Colbert: 'The wine is drawn, and we must drink it.' They did so by holding on till Lannes and Soult gained the centre of the plateau, which was a signal for the whole French line to go forward.

At such moments Ney ceased to belong to the Marshalate and reverted to the ranks, heading them with the shouts and gesture of an infantry demon. The Prussian line was in full retreat by the time his other brigades were darkening the field, but the advance-guard of the 6th had already been employed with enough energy to make up for a corps of bayonets. Murat's cavalry at once wheeled off in pursuit, and Ney's divisions, being apparently fresh, were ordered on to clean up after the sabres.

This gave the two hot-tempered Marshals a chance to continue their bickering, with Murat, by reason of his mounted command, adding the advantage of place on the road to that of seniority. But private feelings were not allowed to weigh upon the pursuit. Ney rushed his corps by terrific marching to Weimar, where the men, exhausted beyond the need of warmth or rations, dropped like stones and slumbered in the roadway. Murat had already taken off his feathers in the Grand Duke's palace, a piece of intelligence that sent his rival stamping off to

a local hostelry. Next day they swept on to Erfurt, with Ney still lipping the dust of Murat's column.

Now it was one thing for the cavalry to round up prisoners and convoys, but when it came to the walled obstinacy of Erfurt Murat was bound to call in Ney's battalions. They took it, whereupon the Gascon calmly plumed himself in a new success and clattered off in full cry for Magdeburg. Ney was left to storm and settle the business of occupation, while availing himself of the chance to strike an attitude on behalf of the Grand Army. He discovered the whereabouts of Marshal Mollendorf, an old veteran of Frederick the Great's time, and paid him a visit, saying as he entered the room: 'The youngest of Marshals is come to pay homage to the senior of them all.' It was a passing bow from one professional challenger of death to another; after which he set off in the tracks of Murat, who was again waiting for infantry to batter the resistance of Magdeburg.

It was the 25th of October when Ney, bridging the Elbe, distributed his forces on two sides of the city and opened siege with a mortar bombardment. This proved ineffectual, so Ney resorted to a more potent bluff and threatened Magdeburg with a taste of heavy artillery, which arm, by the way, was totally non-existent in the 6th Corps. On November 8th the Prussian General Kleist surrendered, his garrison being granted the honours of war while officers were set free on parole. Kleist was a typical coalition commander, being a mere spark of eighty who could scarcely grunt his way into the saddle; while Ney, as the Empire's representative in Magdeburg, was a seasoned Marshal of thirty-seven.

Meanwhile the tricolour had been mounted in Berlin, where the various corps were concentrating under a shower of medals and promotions. Ney prepared his coming by sending Napoleon a long account of the flurried moves at Jena, then, leaving a small detachment behind at Magdeburg, he marched to the Prussian capital. There was a short rest and preparation before venturing

another throw with the Tsar, whose menace implied a more baffling quality than that of his German ally. And during this time Napoleon moved two symbols as record of the latter's downfall: the stone of defeat from the plains of Rossbach, and Frederick's sword from his tomb in the Garrison Church. He might have performed something of more lasting value had he wiped Prussia, once and for all, from the map of Europe.

The Grand Army began its march to Posen with Ney's corps in the second line. There was no opposition, the nearest remaining Prussians being quartered at Thorn, and Ney and his staff travelled in coaches ahead of the column. From Posen, occupied on November 15th, the advance continued to the banks of the Vistula, a way of forests and barely discernible roads made worse by the vilest weather and desolate condition of the troops. Thinned by dysentery, the ranks had no other diet but water and potatoes, uniforms were ragged, and boots could only be held to the feet with cording.

The 1st Division of Ney's corps was opposite Thorn by December 4th. Although the Prussians soon evacuated there was some difficulty in crossing, the bridge having been partly demolished, while drifting ice crowded the way of boats. A general gathering of Ney's force in the vicinity was prolonged till December 15th, and three days later he was sent to control the region on the left of the Grand Army whose main position, to the north of Warsaw, was in line with the Russian advance under Bennigsen.

On the 26th he encountered an offshoot of the Prussian retirement at Soldau, and sent it flying. But the terrible roads, added to the state of his corps, made it impossible to follow up the movement, and a rest was called in the districts of Mlawa and Niedenburg. By then his command had been reduced to 10,000, which reflected the wholesale declining of the total Grand Army to about 100,000. This marked a loss through battle, sickness, and privation of nearly half its effectives.

The opening days of 1807 found Ney with his staff in the burgomaster's dwelling at Niedenburg. His immediate problems, beyond any thought of the enemy, were food and weather. Men were existing at starvation level, the country was one vast quagmire in which any attempt to operate was cut short by the wheels of gun and transport sinking to the axle. General Marbot made a vivid summary of the situation: 'Weather frightful, victuals very scarce, no wine, beer detestable, water muddy, no bread, lodgings shared with cows and pigs.' The Grand Army had cause to remember that Polish purgatory, when snow, with its aftermath of solid ice, would have been a blessing.

There was some improvement on January 11th, which encouraged Ney to take advantage of reports that reached him at head-quarters. Königsberg was on the point of surrender, while by moving his divisions farther north they could get supplies from villages beyond the area of requisition. He had no warrant for either of his next moves, which were to send Colbert's brigade in the direction of Königsberg and then alter his own frontage. But Colbert was brought to a stop by news of a local armistice with the Prussians, while by striking north Ney had created a dangerous gap between his right wing and Soult's 4th Corps on the left.

Having gone so far Ney decided to acquaint Napoleon. He chose one of his aides, De Fezensac, for the task, which was no promenade as it necessitated a dirty passage of 150 miles. Jomini was also on mission in Warsaw at the time, and he returned with Napoleon's answer to Allenstein, where Ney had his new quarters, on January 20th. In effect Ney was reminded that not he but Napoleon had charge of the Grand Army, and directed its movements. Why add needless fatigue to the already dangerous condition of the troops? The message closed with an imputation likely to touch the pride of any old campaigner: 'His Majesty believes that the position of the enemy is due to the rash manœuvre made by Marshal Ney.'



It certainly left the commander of the 6th Corps downcast. He wrote Berthier a letter full of excuses for his sudden disposition and protests of loyalty to the Emperor; on top of which a further change in the climate gave him no choice but to rescind the fateful orders without any more attempts at justification. A gripping frost had laid hold of the roads and made them passable, so that the Russians were pushing on to Heilsberg. This threatened to isolate Colbert, who was in Bartenstein, and the 6th Corps made a general withdrawal which extended through Hohenstein and came to a halt at Gilgenburg on the 29th.

Ney was thus carried beyond reach of the Russian advance, which aimed at Mohrungen where Bernadotte was standing. The original French plan was to strike on the left rear of the enemy, but Bennigsen got wind of this and dropped back to a line on the Passarge. His westward drive was obviously at a standstill, and Ney moved up to Hohenstein again on the 1st of February. Three days later he fell in with a Russian rear-guard, which covered the massing of Bennigsen's troops at Eylau where they stood to encounter the first shock of the Grand Army.

But before joining the Emperor Ney was hurried to intercept a Prussian force on the left bank of the Passarge. He crossed at Deppen, came up with the tail of his quarry at Waltersdorf, cleared Wormditt on the 6th and Landsberg on the day following. The night of the 7th closed down with a blinding snowstorm as De Fezensac again turned his mount in the direction of head-quarters, this time at Eylau, with news of the Prussian rout and to bring back orders for Ney. It was terrible going for the aide-de-camp, over icy roads that six times threw horse and rider. But he got to the Emperor, tethered his horse at a near-by cart, and dropped asleep in the open.

At dawn he received instructions for the 6th Corps. Ney was to give up following the Prussians, and execute a right swing that would carry him as left flank of the

French Army to the carnage at Eylau on that 8th of February 1807.

Artillery was pounding over the snow as De Fezensac set off in the direction of the Kreutzburg road. But the echoes had barely faded behind him before another muttering broke out in front, as evidence that Ney was still in touch with the Prussians. The arrival of Napoleon's message, however, meant a speedy breaking-off, and the 6th Corps turned its head to the east, marching (as ordered by the old Revolutionary maxim) to the sound of the cannon.

Ney was to miss the awful impact of battle that came as a first challenge to the hitherto victorious status of Napoleon. He was not to see Augereau, mantled in a great white scarf, lead the attack in the face of a blizzard, and so expose his flank that it needed Murat with his century of squadrons and 'feathers that rose above his head like a church tower', as Napoleon put it, to charge down and restore the wreckage with turn of sabre. The day was through and a red sun going down behind the birch-trees on the western rim of the snowy flats when Ney appeared. And although his columns failed to engage they persuaded Bennigsen that the fight had taken a new turn, and he drew off into the twilight.

The reality of the Russian withdrawal was not apparent to Ney, who looked forward to a prominent part on the morrow. He spent the night with his staff on bare boards in a wayside cottage, and it seems there was drama in the air to colour their expectance of sunrise. Even the Marshal reacted as though to a sense of sinister awareness on the frozen field of Eylau, and before sleeping his conversation was wild and affected. 'If need be,' he told his officers, 'I shall dismount sword in hand, and I hope you will all follow.' It was a needless stipulation for any grade of the Grand Army, but, as men who recognized in the straining of his greater nerve a core for their own anxiety, they reassured him.

With the coming of daylight, when the Russians were

known to have vanished, Ney's men took possession of Eylau. His crossing of the field was sufficient to justify the forebodings that passed through the Grand Army as a result of the battle, for the snowy ground was over-spread by torrents of crimson from the 50,000 dead and wounded that lay more thickly than an autumn burden.

One battery alone held the bodies of 200 grenadiers surrounded by the ruins of a Russian assault, four ranks deep, where neither side had given or asked for quarter. Those who passed were startled by a faint cry of 'Vive l'Empereur!' from this heap of mangled flesh, uniform, muskets, and broken cannon. Eventually a young officer was recovered, still breathing and with a torn flag twisted about his body. But he could no more than raise himself by the elbows, and died calling out on France, the Emperor, and his mother. Such were the horror and devotion that reigned at Eylau.

It shook even Ney, than whom no man would have surrendered or endured more for the sake of glory, and who cultivated a wellnigh artistic appreciation of battle scenes. He was long silent, and then came his only remark: 'What a massacre, and all to no purpose!' while his features had lost their sternness.

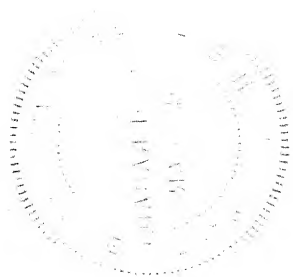
It was perfect hell to be billeted in Eylau, what with the shoals of dead and the wounded for whom there was no assistance, the dismal weather that made one glad to sleep on a dung-heap for warmth, and the griping fare of melted snow and potatoes. But one fact emerged from the bloodshed. The white uniforms of Royalist association retained by some of the regiments were declared unsuitable, both for the eye and nerve of surviving comrades; and soon after this red trousers came into use among the French Army.

When Napoleon turned back across the Vistula on the 16th, Ney's corps, after a round of outpost duty, covered the rear. He excelled in this type of warfare, as the Russians soon found when they ventured too close at Guttstadt on March 2nd. For Ney's rear was suddenly



MARSHAL NEY

*From the Painting by Langlois at Versailles*



converted into a vanguard, which drove them from the town, captured their stores, and beat them up all the way to Heilsberg; after which he dropped into line, still masking Napoleon's main position between the Passarge and lower Vistula.

Both armies had wounds to lick and losses to repair during their stay in quarters, and the French proceeded so quickly that within a few weeks Ney's corps could muster its average of 20,000. Breaking-point, so nearly encountered at Eylau and immediately after, passed from the prospect of the Grand Army. Napoleon's irritation gave way to a dream for building a Temple of the Madeleine in honour of his legions, again raised to 150,000. And the Russians at last decided that it was better to risk another battle than let the recovery go farther.

It was now June, and instead of winter floods the country bore a coating of dust and swarming flies. Ney in his leading position was attacked on the 5th, and made the Russians fight for every inch of ground to Deppen crossing, where he held the banks while the main army streamed over. The rate of going was barely five miles a day, with always enough sting in the rear-guard to ward off attacks from the general concentration. Ney had a feverish time, and it came as a mere detail when he lost his luggage and was forced to borrow a pair of breeches before he could retire decently, like a Napoleonic Marshal, now that sansculotte days were over.

At last Napoleon, with his dispositions effected, faced about and pointed the Grand Army across the Passarge. Back went the Russians, and in the pursuit Ney's corps arrived at Eylau again on the 13th. By this time the landscape had been restored to healthy nature, with sunlight picking out some colossal mounds marking the dead of that indecisive slaughter. There were rich fields and waving trees reflected in smooth lakes, the whole scene shining like a happy omen to men who recalled the mud and snow of an earlier crossing. And it was a

wildly impatient host that threaded the left bank of the Alle towards Friedland, a little town in the bend of the river protected by a range of hills running westward.

On these hills the Russians were massing. It was the 14th of June, the anniversary of Marengo, a day that promised well for the Emperor's star. Ney, with his troops emerging from the woods of Sortlack, was to drive home on the left. Napoleon had taken his arm, turning in the direction of Friedland and the Muscovites: 'There is your goal. March to it without looking about you.'

March? The difficulty was to make the men bide their orders. But apart from the chafing grenadiers there were some young soldiers in the ranks who bobbed their heads when the bullets began to shower. Whereupon Ney, rising from the saddle like a ramrod, reminded them of his own statuesque calmness: 'Comrades, the enemy are firing in the air. Here I am higher than the top of your bearskins, and they don't hurt me.' Not a head moved after that.

His way of advance lay over a rolling valley, which was still menaced by a body of Russian horse. Even Ney admitted that for infantry to move across such ground was to court disaster, so he called upon some Cavalry of the Guard, reined near by, to effect a clearance. But discipline forbade those elect riders to move without word from the Emperor, and a handful of hussars were all the mounted troops at Ney's disposal. Now discipline was one thing, and the temper of the Grand Army was quite another; and Ney, in characteristic fashion, risked all upon his knowledge of that proven temper.

He gave a mad word of command, and his handful rode full tilt at the Russian phalanx. This was far too much for the glittering guardsmen to endure, and they too went spurring down the hollow, sweeping it clean enough for the bayonet to go forward against the heights. The advance up slope was led by Ney and the skirmishers, with his 1st Division pressing close until, within full

sight of the opposite bank of the Alle, it was blasted by the frontal and cross-fire of artillery.

In a few moments the leading column had gone to pieces. Disorder threatened the whole attack, and was only averted by the masterful example of Ney, still towering above the heads of his infantry, with waving sword and a voice that was half threat and half appeal carrying in defiance of the uproar. Gradually the brigades stiffened, and followed him. The heights still guarded by that devastating weight of metal were gained, the first line of defence was scored through, and the second crumbled. But beyond that was more resistant stuff—the steel and leather of the Russian Imperial Guard. There was a terrific struggle at this point, but Victor's corps came up on the left and between them the two Marshals drove helter-skelter into the town, where Ney was only brought to a standstill by lack of opponents.

Friedland was Red-head's day, as everybody admitted. 'That man is a lion,' said Napoleon after the victory; while Berthier wrote: 'You can form no idea of the brilliant courage of Marshal Ney.' Another great slaughter had recompensed for the indecisive massacre at Eylau, and with the signing of the Treaty of Tilsit Napoleon and Tsar Alexander made another pretence at renewing friendship.

The relaxation of peace found Ney returning to France, where he divided his time between Paris and a new estate that he purchased near Chateaudun. He had come back the richer by an annual receipt of 28,000 francs, while later he received a lump sum of 300,000 francs and a similar amount in bonds. This meant wealth, but it was hardly an excessive reward for alternately serving as advance- and rear-guard to the Grand Army in a stroke Napoleonic.

The spirit of the soldiery commanded during that march through Europe was shown by an incident when Napoleon and the Tsar, soon after the dining and hand-shakes at Tilsit, encountered a veteran of the tricolour



whose face, from chin to forehead, had been gashed by a Russian sabre.

‘What do you think of soldiers who survive such wounds as that?’ asked Napoleon.

The Tsar parried: ‘And what do you think of soldiers who deal such wounds?’

It was then the turn of the grenadier, dry-toned and without lapse of expression: ‘They’re all dead, they are.’

Ney, as an ex-ranker, would have admitted that the honours of this meeting, like those of Austerlitz, Jena, and Friedland, rested with the men who seldom change their note and never their faces.

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## CHAPTER VI THE PENINSULA

THERE was one corner of the European battlefield from which few of Napoleon's Marshals (Suchet being a notable exception) emerged with honour; and that was the Peninsula of Spain. It must be borne in mind that Spain was then a dependency of the Empire, and Napoleon's excuse for intervention was provided by the absolute corruption of its Royal House.

The doddering Charles IV had been pushed aside in favour of Prince Ferdinand, but a French army, coming down from the north upon Madrid, forced him to abdicate, whereupon a slavish assembly of Spanish notables allowed Napoleon's brother, Joseph, to be foisted upon the country as King. This was finally accomplished on August 1st 1808.

Now it needs to be acknowledged that Napoleon hoped much, in the way of political and social reforms, from this usurpation, without insisting upon the decadence of the régime he superseded. But it proved too much for the Spaniards, whose native pride boiled over to such a degree that British help was requested. The fires of revolt were soon raging in Asturias, Galicia, Leon, Murcia, Andalusia, and Valencia, while the Redcoats landed in Portugal.

The French were driven out of that country, Joseph left Madrid, while the successive defeats of Moncey, Junot, and Dupont made it clear that greater force was required if the Spaniards were to be kept in alliance with French policy. Napoleon, who attributed his failure less to principles than the means he employed, summed up the situation in a threat: 'I have sent the Spaniards lambs whom they have devoured. I shall send them wolves who will devour them in their turn.' It was necessary

to regain Madrid, put down the Spanish risings, and drive the British from their base in Portugal. And one of the 'wolves' selected for these tasks was Marshal Ney, whose 6th Corps wheeled from the Rhine, struck across France and penetrated the Pyrenees, to muster at the frontier town of Irun on August 30th.

It was high summer; the names of Jena and Friedland were like strong wine on the lips, and men could still associate the Eagles' march with the coming of festival. Gifts and the promise of victory waited at every halt, and the route of the 6th Corps during those swinging days reflected the brief meridian of the Empire. Sir John Moore and his 'Goddams' were moving from Portugal, while the Spaniards, in three separate bodies, were striking north. But Napoleon was at Vittoria with some 70,000, and Ney's corps, although reduced by later formation to a bare 15,000, could experience that familiarity of mind and mettle that passes between units of long and tried acquaintance in the hazard of arms. For its remaining man-power was not essentially different from the corps which had gathered under Ney to menace the Channel; which factor, a valuable one to any concentration, acquires additional strength when its cause derives from enthusiasm, as must every war that follows a revolution. But many things came to an end in Spain, and not least was the Napoleonic theory of contact.

The first goal was Madrid, and Ney, ordered to advance, began his moves by way of Burgos, Aranda, and Soria. But it was soon clear that the Spanish venture was of a different order from the German, or even the Russian, for that matter. Not that the Spaniards showed a single one of the qualities which had caused the French to liken their Muscovite enemies to bulls; but one felt the presence of a wellnigh intangible opponent, a hostile sentiment that was vested in an entire people rather than a centre of armed detachment, the weight of a public instead of a professional counteraction. In short, for an

army on Spanish soil to be pitted against the Spanish *mind*, was a much more formidable proposition than the overturning of thrones.

Ney was confounded almost at the start, and instead of pressing on to head off the midmost of the three Spanish columns he pulled up at Soria. The atmosphere of the country he was encountering might have been typified by the confronting hills, where every bend and valley seemed pregnant with treachery and defeat. Communication between the corps could not be maintained in a land whose inhabitants of all ages and both sexes seemed bound up with the guerrilla tactics, supplies had run short and could not be replenished without danger, while information was even more scanty. Moreover, where would the next enemy appear, and in what guise? Actuated by these thoughts (the bane of every French commander in the Peninsula), the headstrong hussar whose brave lust for glory had nearly ruined the plan of Jena hesitated for one, two, finally three days; and at the end of it all executed a branching movement which failed to take into account his original orders.

He headed his corps for Agreda, felt for the enemy in that direction, failed to bite, marched through Tarra-gona, and halted again at Alagon on November 28th. Moncey was making his way thereabout intending to sit down in front of Saragossa, and the prospect of a siege appealed to Ney as a means out of his difficulty. But Napoleon stepped in, and after damning the Marshal for his waste of time at Soria and the empty days that were being passed at Alagon he sent the 6th Corps on another effort to engage the Spaniards.

This was terminated by Napoleon's recovery of Madrid on December 4th, when Ney was ordered to join the concentration in the capital preparatory to closing with the 20,000 British under Sir John Moore. By giving the mountain passes a wide berth and keeping to the ordinary roads Ney entered Madrid ten days behind the Emperor, who reviewed his force of 50,000 without reference to

the recent shortcomings in the leadership of the 6th Corps. It was not infallibility but faithfulness that Napoleon looked for in his lieutenants. Besides, conditions pointed to a speedy and successful decision being arrived at in Spain.

With the odds heavy against him Moore began his famous retreat to Corunna. The French, with Soult in the van and Ney following a good second, drove him seaward on a north-westering line of mountain passes, precipice, and table-land that extended through Castile and Leon, on to Astorga, with the ice and snow drifts of a chronic winter impeding every mile of the way. So dense were the snowstorms that a fall of a few minutes was sufficient to block the passes, while fierce gales sweeping the mountains carried many a horse and rider off the slopes. However, apart from sending his cavalry forward to help Soult against an obstinate rear-guard Ney had no fighting during the chase, which ended so far as he was concerned at Astorga on January 2nd, when he came up with Napoleon.

Austria was rumbling again and the Emperor was needed in Paris. And as there was no likelihood of the British retreat hardening, Ney's corps was detached to Lugo, with the object of putting down rebellion in the province of Galicia. It was during one of his marches about this time that he fell in with a stray band of women, whom Moore's men, in that age of camp-followers, had been compelled to abandon before retreating. In keeping with his personal record, which, even for a tough soldier, was practically free of blemish, Ney busied himself to find a refuge for these women, and naturally applied at a convent. But the moment the nuns looked over their suggested charges they smelt heresy, and declined to admit them.

'Very well,' said Ney. 'I appreciate your scruples, and will send you instead a company of grenadiers whose Catholicity can be vouched for.' Needless to say the good nuns plumped for the heretics.

It was still a difficult matter to maintain communications with Paris, or even Madrid, where Joseph was airing his crown again. Moreover, the task of restoring order and government to a dissatisfied province, although he was completely independent, offered bare scope for the natural talents of the red-headed soldier, who confessed a profound distaste for the Spanish nightmare. Three months had been specified by Napoleon as the time required to subjugate the Peninsula. To this Ney growled a correction: 'The men of this country are obstinate, and the women and children fight. I see no end to the war.'

But lack of enthusiasm did nothing to prejudice the manner of performing his office. Settling at Corunna, where Sir John Moore had been killed in the fighting of January 16th 1809, he made a survey of the province, fixed garrisons in the principal centres, quelled local insurrections, reorganized the system of taxation, and generally gave a new working basis to the military and civil administrations without incurring resentment. This latter proviso may be judged the best achievement of his viceroyship, as the hatred then flourishing in Spain was something unique, even for a war of invasion.

Ney's temperate fair-mindedness was shown by his thoughtful stipulation on behalf of the Spanish officers' wives in the province under his care. To these he made a regular allowance, amounting to one half of the normal pay belonging to their husband's rank, from the collected revenues. He also made a blundering exposure of a popular fallacy, current at all times and of all places, to the effect that convents held many an unwilling inmate who was prevented (by some inexplicable law unknown to the most orthodox Catholic) from gaining a longed-for freedom.

He decided to investigate the truth of this awkward predicament with his staff, and went on a round of the convents. Calling the nuns, novices, and lay-sisters before them, the Marshal, pointing out the door, announced

that they were bird-free to wander. But after various calls and repeated invitations only one young lady declared her acceptance. She afterwards married a French officer, and even here it needs to be said that we are ignorant of her conventual status or the extent of her vows.

But one cloister, at least, yielded a much more promising spectacle in the shape of a girlish novice who fell on her knees before the questioner and gave way to a torrent of tears and excited Spanish. This was quite in the expected manner, an obvious denial of the liberty waisted by the Eagles. But finally it was borne upon the Marshal that instead of sympathy the girl was begging his help to bind her to the very principle he had come to expose. For she being under age, the authorities refused her taking of the solemn vows, which fact, apart from her overwhelming preference, implied a further negation of the Marshal's errand. After that he discontinued the visits, which marked his first and only experience as a futile rear-guard.

But there was no subsidence in the fever of assassination among the Spaniards, or of terrible reprisals on the part of the French, which made the country a sheer inferno over and above the inevitable horrors of war. The simplest and most eloquent proof is that Ney found nothing commendable in the business. Men acted as though cut off from the background of civilization, with no other feeling than a mad desire to kill, burn, or loot. Every shadow concealed a dagger, every turning a trap. With alarm bells swinging in all the Spanish steeples (and there were plenty of them) the animal instinct ran riot, even the children repeating a piously patriotic form of catechism in which it was laid down that heaven could be gained by killing one of the dogs of Frenchmen.

The Marshals acted blindly, and cursed a war in which it was even odds whether the all-important despatch-bearers would reach their destination or fall under a peasant's knife. The wonder is that the French armies

retained a merely skeleton cohesion, for all things considered, Wellington should have enjoyed a picnic expedition in the Peninsula. But the general conduct of the British soldier was so bad that the Spaniards often doubted whether their prime hatred was directed towards their allies or the French. There was equal truth in Wellington's statement that his army was unable to bear success or defeat, and in Napoleon's to the effect that he had put the English Army through its training in the Peninsula.

A hundred years later T. E. (Arabian) Lawrence was to summarize the difficulties of irregular conflict in these terms: 'To make war upon rebellion is messy and slow, like eating soup with a knife.'<sup>1</sup> And the memory of this must be translated into every story of what Napoleon was to call the 'Spanish ulcer', which was almost his ruin. Talleyrand, anticipating Lawrence, acknowledged as much when he said: 'The finest armies melt away before the anger of a nation.' It was probably this awareness of the Spanish people constituting a more sinister danger than British force that shortened Napoleon's vision of Wellington, whom he was content to refer to as the 'Sepoy General'.

But these days were not entirely barren for France, despite the misty atmosphere of command, the peril of execution, and a growing sense of rivalry in high places throughout the staff. The Grand Army may not have been present as a corporate entity in Spain, but it lived there in spirit. Witness the case of young Septeuil, who had sounded the whole gamut of fashion and caprice in Paris and gone south only to lose a shattered leg. 'Don't cry,' he told his valet when under the knife, 'you've one boot less to polish now.'

Not a few reputations were seriously compromised in Spain, but tradition survived them.

The increasing chaos of staff work amid such conditions, when the origin of orders or whereabouts of a

<sup>1</sup> T. E. Lawrence. By Liddell Hart. (Jonathan Cape.)



corps were rarely certain, was at last responsible for Ney taking the law into his own hands and acting without warrant. This could not add much to the confusion of a time when instructions from the Paris Government were liable to be counteracted by King Joseph in Madrid, or vice versa.

He accordingly moved beyond Galicia into Asturias, again through mountainous country where the narrowness of the tracks often made it impossible for two men to march abreast. His baggage was packed on mules, while a single battery of four light guns made up his artillery. But the same difficulties were found near the coast as inland. Those of the inhabitants who had not left the province remained dumb when the French sought information, the usual hazards made scouting almost impossible, and even when no more than a few miles of rugged hills divided the armies the Spaniards could always avoid action.

When the last Spanish force evacuated in May it was under protection of the British fleet. There was no further need for Ney to continue his blindfold operations in Asturias, so he tramped back to Galicia where he fell in with the remnants of Soult's corps (which had been hammered out of Portugal) at Lugo on May 30th.

In course of retreating Soult's men had lost everything, from food and ammunition to clothing, so there was much in their condition which appealed to the somewhat dangerous brand of French humour. The more fortunate of Ney's rank-and-file gave full expression to this at the expense of the unlucky 2nd Corps, and during the process of refitting them for the field there were violent quarrels which spread from the men to among the commissioned ranks and finished up by rattling the two Marshals.

The upshot was a terrific scene, when Soult drew his sword and nearly engaged the taunting leader of the 6th Corps in a duel. After that it was no use expecting Ney and Soult to co-operate in any movement. Either corps

could have been lost without its rival raising a finger, Soult setting the fashion by marching into Leon the moment he was furbished again, and leaving the other Marshal exposed to a menace of blockade by sea and a joint Allied offensive from the frontier.

To make matters worse King Joseph, who had no head for soldiering, advised Ney that he was to hold himself under Soult's orders. Go to hell, thought Ney, but since he was forced to follow the line of march out of Galicia he relieved his spite on the various villages he passed through. It was the first and only time that he fell from grace as regards the treatment of civilians, and was not so serious but that the relative cleanness of his military escutcheon gives it prominence. Moreover, peasant raids upon the flanks and outposts continued, which produced a state of nerves in the isolated centres among the hill ways.

The drift of war caused a British retirement into Portugal, after which Ney was sent to keep order in the region of Salamanca. Apart from reinforcements arriving the work was not strenuous, and in October it seemed to Ney that his grip was secure enough to justify a spell of absence. He handed over the reins to General Marchand and returned to Paris, but family life was soon interrupted by news of trouble in the vacated district.

Napoleon wanted to know what business he had in Paris at such a time. Ney tried to excuse himself by blaming Jomini, his Chief-of-Staff, who promptly handed in his resignation. While on top of a disheartening return to Salamanca was the fact of its being so quiet through the winter and spring months of 1810 that Ney and his officers had no more thrilling occupation than whist, though luckily the money was there to merit winning.

A strange incident occurred on June 8th, when a certain Spaniard, whose presumption outweighed his common sense, invited Marshal Ney to become a deserter. This sanguine attempt may have been influenced by the knowledge that Ney had entertained hopes of becoming

Commander-in-Chief of the Army in Portugal, which had recently been dashed by the appointment of Masséna, who fixed his quarters at Valladolid.

Masséna was no longer the brilliant soldier of early days, and also shared the prevailing lack of enthusiasm for the Spanish war. He had advanced every likely reason, including his rheumatism, against being appointed, but Napoleon countered this last by a reminder of the salubrious climate. Whatever the cause, Masséna's presence seemed all that was needed to offset Ney's temper, which had grown ragged in Spain. And the two were soon at a state of loggerheads, compared to which the recent relations between the 6th and 2nd Corps appeared almost friendly.

In the middle of June Ney reinforced the besiegers of Ciudad Rodrigo, where the operations, according to his hastier judgment, were needlessly extended. He had given a lead to the quarrel by asking Masséna, none too pleasantly, whether he should attack Wellington or help to reduce the fortress, where one of his own engineer officers had charge of the works. And Masséna piled up the fuel by sending a member of Junot's staff to conduct the siege, which Ney resented as an uncalled-for interference. He had no use for the protégés of Junot. If they lived up to their reputations, let him employ them. So with that the unfortunate engineer went back to Masséna.

The Commander-in-Chief gave way to a fury that equalled Ney's, threatened to send him home as insubordinate, and returned the officer. Two days later he was again at head-quarters, with a covering letter from Ney which is surely among the most amazing of pen products as being sent by a general officer to his immediate superior in war time:

'I am a Duke and a Marshal of the Empire like you.  
. . . You tell me that you are Commander-in-Chief of  
the Army of Portugal. I know it only too well. So

when you tell Michel Ney to lead his troops against the enemy you will see how he will obey you. . . . But when it pleases you to disarrange the staff of the Army, you must understand that I will no more listen to your orders than I fear your threats. . . . I esteem you, and you know it. You esteem me, and I know it. But why the devil sow discord between us over a mere caprice? For after all, how on earth are you to know that your little man can throw a bomb better than my old veteran, who is, I assure you, a reliable fellow. They say your man dances prettily; all the better for him; but this does not prove that he can make those mad Spaniards dance, and that is what we want.'

Masséna put the case before Junot: 'You see it is impossible to do anything with that man. . . . Am I then only a sham Commander-in-Chief? I mean that this young man shall conduct the siege, and by the devil in hell Monsieur Ney shall bend the knee before my will, or my name is not Masséna!'

In this mood he hurried to the scene of operations, where he told Ney that he must recognize the officer's appointment or be sent back to France. The surrender was made with a bad grace, to relieve which Ney proceeded to draw up plans for storming the fortress. But this was forestalled by the garrison giving in on July 9th, when the governor, who had met with an accident, apologized to Ney for his inability to appear in uniform for the handing over of his sword. The Marshal met him with equal courtesy: 'Monsieur le Gouverneur, you have made too good use of it for us to think of taking it from you.'

For notwithstanding their rivalry and feats of temper, the Marshals were chivalrous fighters with the brave man's habitual respect for duty on the part of others. The injured prisoner was sure of careful treatment at their hands, as may be shown by the case of Major Napier

(brother to the colonel and historian) who was captured, in a wounded condition, by Ney's men.

The Marshal saw to his being provided with money and comfortable lodgings with the French consul. Then, hearing that news of his death was being circulated, he made him one of a batch of other English prisoners, simply obtained their promise not to serve until they had been exchanged, and sent them home for the sake of the wounded man's mother.

Such acts are an illustration of strength and foresight. For the army which can feel, pray, and fight in equal high measure must be wellnigh invincible; although few armies, with the one certain exception of the New Model, would care to admit the association.

The quarrel between Ney and his commander proceeded by marked degrees. At the siege of Almeida, in spite of his corps being engaged, Ney kept in the background because Masséna took charge of the operations; while a succeeding move in the direction of Lisbon gave rise to more serious trouble, which developed on September 25th when the French were halted by the presentation of a British bar at the crest of Busaco, in the vicinity of Coimbra.

Masséna timed his attack for the day following, but beyond that the hardened old pilferer, who was engaged in a new amour, gave little thought to the coming action. He made no survey of the position, and contented himself with the blind assurance that it would soon crumble. Ney was for making the assault at once, having formed the right conclusion that only part of the British force was so far holding the ridge. He sent one of his staff to impress the need of haste upon the Marshal at headquarters, but feminine charms proving more seductive than the insistence of any aide-de-camp, Masséna kept his door locked, and the hour passed.

It was a star crisp night before the battle, with the blaze of bivouac fires dotting the dark mountains. Now that the golden opportunity had been lost Ney doubted

the wisdom of attacking, but Masséna, having left his lady, arrived on the scene with a keenness that brooked no question. His dispositions were faulty in so far as the French advance could not be immediately supported, and a member of Ney's staff, transcribing from the Marshal's dictation, pointed this out.

'Write on,' came the answer; 'these are not *my* orders.' For to-morrow was Masséna's show, and the issue could be damned in advance for all Ney troubled.

It was barely dawn when he attacked in three columns, by way of a steep path leading through woods to the line of Redcoats under Crawford. All was well at first, the guns and infantry falling back as the 6th Corps went forward. But having set foot on the ridge Ney's men were suddenly assailed by the British reserve. A close volley in which every bullet found its mark could not check the bayonets, and with the glint of steel threatening both their flanks the French wavered. A retirement to the sheltering pine-woods, with the 'Goddams' pouring down the hill in pursuit, was well conducted; after which Ney's corps was treated to an hour's heavy pounding by the British artillery. Such was the French failure at Busaco on September 26th 1810.

But Masséna rallied, and drove the British back into Portugal, where they entrenched in the famous lines of Torres Vedras. Even Ney recognized the impregnability of this work, which ran in three ranges, the longest covering nearly thirty miles from Alhandra on the Tagus to where it met the sea at Zizandre. And since the position could not be stormed, and it was sheer starvation to sit down indefinitely in Portugal (as they did until March 3rd 1811), the French retreated, covered as usual by the rear-guard genius of the 6th Corps.

It was a dismal process. Supplies and man-power had dwindled during the wastage of those winter months, which losses meant a proportionate rise in the strength and daring of irregular tactics. But Ney carried out a fine piece of bluff in front of Torres Vedras, leading

Wellington to anticipate an attack through a period of four days, thus enabling the other corps to consolidate their retirement.

On March 9th the British Light Division caught him up at Piombal, where the French had bungled the blowing up of a bridge, while three days later he turned to fight at Redinha. The pursuit was vigorously sustained, and all Ney's mastery was exercised in covering the main movements. He struck off on another line of retreat, made a brief rally at Miranda, was driven out, and after the 39th Infantry had lost its Eagle and only the admirable coolness of his hindmost brigade averted panic, they arrived at Colerico, within reach of the frontier, on the 23rd.

'Day after day Ney, the indefatigable Ney, offered battle with the rear-guard, and a stream of fire ran along the wasted valleys of Portugal.' So wrote Napier. The wagon-train had to be sacrificed during the retirement, and it was characteristic of Ney that the first vehicle he set fire to was the one holding his own belongings. He then passed on to Masséna's property, and since the Commander-in-Chief plundered wherever he went more brands were needed.

The position of the two Marshals was now somewhat tolerable, and that being so they immediately renewed their quarrel. Ney had already angered Masséna still more by giving his mistress the cold shoulder in public, and also by returning a telescope which had reached him from the Commander-in-Chief, on the ground that it was stolen. He had, of course, hit the right nail on the head, for Masséna had looted the telescope from the University of Coimbra. But the sense of being found out was irksome to the senior Marshal, while his little lady was highly incensed by the attitude of the clumsy Lorrainer.

The Commander-in-Chief's policy was set against the evacuation of Portugal, while Ney declared there was no useful purpose in holding on. Next came Masséna's instructions for the 6th Corps to enter Guarda, which

Ney countered by threatening a march into Spain by way of Almeida. It was the last straw. A report of the matter was sent to Napoleon, General Loison replaced Ney, while the latter was ordered to Madrid to await developments.

'It is grievous for an old soldier who has commanded armies for so many years to arrive at such a pass with one of his comrades,' reflected Masséna. But no such qualm disturbed Napoleon, who by this time was thoroughly inured to the quarrels of his Marshals. 'No one knew what it was to deal with two men like Ney and Soult,' he was to remark later. Now there was Ney's serious upset with Masséna, who was also at odds with Bessières. The latter had offended Soult and again Lannes, while that fiery Gascon was ready to cut the throat of Murat (who incidentally had fallen foul of Ney, Soult, and Davout), apart from his other heated moments with Soult. Davout shared a mutual dislike with Berthier and Bernadotte, Jourdan and Victor annoyed each other, while St. Cyr and Macdonald were enemies.

The complaints that poured in were therefore a tax upon the Emperor's diplomacy, and the most he could do was to keep peace by evenly distributing command or making a tactful removal here and there. In this case he sent Ney home to Coudreaux, for his further employment in Spain would have offended Masséna, and his exit from the Peninsula was probably the one occasion when Ney felt no regrets at leaving an enemy in the field. His soldierly instincts had long been opposed to a war which was largely at the mercy of guerrilla tactics, while it was clear that by some fatal mingling of material and psychological factors there was no new lustre to be won by the French service in Spain.

On March 22nd 1811 Ney paraded his 6th Corps for the last time at Carapichina. It was the farewell of veterans to a Marshal who had ridden ahead of them since the time of their formation as a separate unit of the Grand Army. They had covered the routes of Europe



and made history together, working the indissoluble bond that unites men in the knowledge that mortal failings have been survived and a great destiny challenged. And since such men can never be hollow cynics there were tears in the eyes of the 'old grumblers', who reverted to sentiment as readily as they plied the bayonet.

It was not for them to realize or express how Michel Ney symbolized their inheritance of Valmy and the Sambre-et-Meuse, the high remoteness of a time when every dawn brought a new danger and the Empire had not been founded. But they fled away overshadowed by a feeling of change and of great years closing, while a fading tramp carried to Ney the last echoes of Elchingen, of the mad muster at Jena and the charge at Friedland.

Besides a frayed temper, Ney carried back to France a relic of St. James of Compostello, which had been given him by the monks of St. Jago in appreciation of his conduct when governing their province. To the lay mind of a soldier whose background was revolution the relic most probably had a purely nominal significance; but, in striking contrast to Masséna and his like, it was and continued to be the only trophy of conquered soil in Ney's possession.

Few facts of his home life at this or at any other period emerge, for the Marshals belonged to their calling, and family ties were practically a detail which only attained a more persuasive scope as the fortunes of the Empire darkened. But we know how Ney's destiny was being shaped, for some weeks later, when trees were budding in the park at Rambouillet, Napoleon spread his maps under their shadow and moved the assembly of coloured pins eastward; not, indeed, to the farthest point they had ever encountered, but to the most doubtful, the most enigmatic, which meant that it was too far from France. He was tracing the tragedy of 1812.

But home existence with wife and children, no less than service under Masséna, had its own problems even though the consequences were lighter. For Ney was

not so tractable in observing the make-believe of Court convention and etiquette as, for instance, Marmont and Junot, who gave their respective wives (otherwise the Duchess of Ragusa and Duchess of Abrantés) far less trouble than was encountered by the socially circumspect Duchess of Elchingen. There was an instance of this on August 25th 1811, when the Empress Joséphine held a reception at Trianon.

The first problem to beset the women was how to travel the four and a half leagues from Paris in Court costume, which was overcome by the suggestion that they should change in a friend's house at Versailles. But this was not all so far as Madame Ney was concerned, for her husband had a marked objection to wearing a full-dress coat. And since she was equally set against his appearing in the eternal uniform she arranged with her maid for the bringing of a splendid garment, light-coloured velvet and embroidered with flowers, from Paris.

When it was almost time, wifely solicitude prompted her to ask if his dress coat needed attention. 'My dress coat?' Ney repeated.

'Yes. You know the Emperor desires that you should all appear in Court dress.'

Ney replied that it was nonsense, and 'masquerade foolery'. 'I will never put it on to get laughed at, as I laugh at others who wear it.'

There was a further remonstrance on account of the Emperor's wishes, to which Ney replied that he would go so far as to buy such an article, but as for wearing it . . .

At this point he was interrupted by the Duke of Abrantés, who was looking so pink and splendid for the occasion that Ney felt he had lost an ally.

'How!' he exclaimed. 'Is it possible that you submit to wearing this harness? Oh, Junot!'

Madame Ney seized this as an opportunity for producing the coat, but the sight of it only increased her husband's repugnance. 'Would you have me dress like a buffoon?'

he asked the women, who chorused their approval of its cut and colour. At last he relieved himself by thrusting the maid's arms into the sleeves, whereupon Madame Junot observed that she resembled a wooden horse in a tailor's shop at the Palais Royal. So the coat was folded up, amid laughter, and returned to the portmanteau. And that night Ney walked the crowded gallery and the cool arcades of Trianon not as courtier but a Marshal of the Empire.

For it needed more than a superfluous covering to turn the head of the cooper's son who was soon to perform the greatest rear-guard exploits in the whole of history.

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## CHAPTER VII THE CRUSADE OF THE SNOWS

THE opening weeks of 1812 passed over a Paris of uncertain mood, in which bursts of pleasure, expressed by a galaxy of masked balls and quadrilles, alternated with a dark foreboding of the military outlook. For Napoleon, in defiance of the historical urge that determines our European culture, with its southern tendency, was preparing to strike north into Russia. Political considerations may have demanded the move, since fear of the Polish kingdom being restored by the French haunted the Tsar, while Napoleon's blockade had given rise to commercial quarrels. Moreover, the Spanish impasse encouraged a new alliance between Russia and England.

But whether we associate the Napoleonic march with personal ambition or universal fate, with the gratifying of a single impulse or an inspired venture towards our ultimate vision of Western unity, there was a sense of forces moving to an appointed end which should mark the utmost limit of the Revolution. Those limits had already been defined, by an habitual calculator, as extending over nineteen degrees of latitude and thirty degrees of longitude. But now the potential borders were to extend from Lisbon to Moscow. A long road, with its eastward stretch running eight hundred miles from Paris. . . . And even Rome never actually *planned* a march to the east, while some years back Napoleon had taught the essential virtue of concentration!

By February the Treaty of Tilsit was so far forgotten that Napoleon began to marshal forces on the right bank of the Vistula. Three months later a crescent-like assembly of corps made up the Grand Army, with its left at Königsberg and its right on the Carpathians in

the Austrian division of Poland. Nine corps, in all exceeding a total of 400,000 men, drawn not only from France but every one of its tributary states which had welcomed the Revolution. There may have been diversity of language, but French, Italian, Poles, Bavarians, Saxons, Württembergers, Hessians, and Westphalians could at least march and certainly fight together. So argued Napoleon in his quarters at Dresden. But the senior officers, who had no careering star to follow, were less positive. Russia was still the Great Unknown, and to the simple fighting man mystery will always imply a menace. So there was little evidence of pre-campaign enthusiasm with the French staff in the spring of 1812.

The concentration had ended Ney's retirement. He was given command of the 3rd Corps, which, like the 1st and 2nd, was mainly French, so that between them they constituted the pivot of the Grand Army. It was composed of two infantry divisions and two brigades of light cavalry, and with the later addition of Württemberg troops came to number some 35,000 infantry and 2,400 horse. But whereas the Marshal had known practically all the ranks in his old formation, the 3rd Corps represented a body of strangers. The distinction was not so great as to impair efficiency, for the Russian failure was to seal Ney's triumph as a leader of the impossible.

Were it not for Moscow, it could only be said of Ney that he was among the bravest of the Marshals. Not that he had been over fortunate in his fields of command, being absent from such high levels as Austerlitz and Wagram yet fully present at the fruitless Peninsula operations. And, unlike Murat, his spectacular appearances were reserved for conduct in battle. There were three things utterly opposed to his nature—surrender, publicity, and plotting, none of which could be rated as an eventuality in the coming campaign, which called for an almost inhuman capacity to endure, a restriction that was Ney's opportunity.

He took command of the 3rd Corps at Metz, and

traversed the length of Germany to swing into line with the rest of the Grand Army from his centre at Thorn.

Here they were quartered till June 6th, when the French columns began to advance on the Niemen. And at this stage it is well to summarize the bearing of the campaign, so that a few general references may afterwards suffice as a tactical background to Ney's corps.

The great space of country ahead was occupied by two Russian armies, Barclay commanding the main body of 200,000 while a smaller force, under Bagration, kept watch on the south. Now it was vital for Napoleon's scheme that these two armies should be kept apart, or, more exactly, that Bagration should not be allowed to join hands with Barclay. But the tragedy was decided in advance by Napoleon's brother, ex-midshipman Jerome Bonaparte, who was given command of the southern group of corps with the object of preventing any such move being made by the Russians.

He was dilatory enough to let Bagration fall back until he could no longer be overreached and therefore cut off from joining with Barclay later on. And this was not an isolated failure but the turning-point of the whole campaign, since it retarded the Grand Army's manœuvres, incurred a terrible wastage, and finally exposed it (on account of time which had been lost) to the horrors of retreating through a Russian winter.

But none of these things were thought of when the French began their eastward march to the frontier waters of the Niemen. It was clear sky above and green country below, intersected by patches of sand or clay with innumerable streams and only clumps of pine, birch, or beechwood to break the flatness. The 3rd Corps, by reason of its previous alignment, marched due east in the pageant of invasion with its martial music, bright Eagles, waving flags, shining helmets and breastplates, the whole reflecting a delirious mood of conquest.

Ney camped in a pine-forest along the river, and his

corps followed the Guard in the crossing which began on the night of Thursday, June 23rd. Four bridges spanned the Niemen, and while the companies of the leading corps crossed by moonlight, the sun had risen, broad and full, when Ney's van set foot on Russian soil. A handful of Cossacks watched the operation from a distance, fired three shots, then wheeled off into the fir tracks.

With that burst of carbine fire the Grand Army was committed to its enterprise. Ney fell into position at the head of his foremost files. A tramping filled the air, the guns rattled, and oxen pulled at the heavy wagons. Napoleon was care-free as a private, and between whistling and humming to himself was heard to remark that the entire passage meant less than a single song on the lips of a girl in Paris; while Alexander was dancing when news came that the French Army had its back to the Niemen.

The first goal on the march was Vilna, and Ney, from being strung somewhat to the north of the main body, regained contact on the 28th in anticipation of the Russians making a stand at the town. But they were contented with the burning of stores, and Ney returned to his original line of march. It was now that brother Jerome perpetrated his fatal delay, but the easy stages by which Fate moves hid this from the invader.

The early days were uneventful going, through endless stretches of fir and pine and great heat that held a suspicion of thunder, with swarms of flies from the low-lying dampness pestering the marchers. There was a halt after Vilna, during which the weather changed to sudden patches of wet and cold which killed off the first great number of horses. A dry warmth returned no less suddenly, and Ney continued in the general trend eastward over the plains. Somewhere in front Murat's cavalry was in fleeting touch with the Cossacks, but otherwise there was no alarm or trace of the enemy. Fires were not allowed, because of the tell-tale reflections,

while the men, with their hands grasping sword or musket, slept on green rye which was soon as monotonous as the woodland.

It was then thought that a delaying action would be attempted at Drissa, where the Russians had fortified the river crossing. Ney speeded up to support Murat, but again the entrenchments were found deserted. This could only mean that the two armies would meet farther on, at Vitebsk, and Ney struck off along the Dwina to fall in with his fellow Marshals on the 22nd. But another disappointment waited there, for Vitebsk was empty.

The total absence of news or definite touch with the enemy was bad for the nerves, and when Napoleon spoke of going on to Smolensk Berthier, the iron-framed Berthier, burst out crying. No one knew where the Russians were, and Ney was sent in the direction of Smolensk, where he encountered the usual signs of a great army in motion; one of these signs being that not a scrap of food remained in the district.

Now the French had planned to provision themselves on the march, apart from which their normal transport arrangements proved faulty, as did most things on the far side of the Niemen. Water was scarce, a hot sun blazed through a stifling atmosphere, and choking dust covered the units. The constant failing of horses weakened the cavalry and the haulage power of the guns over scorched roadway. The staple fare was rye soup, which spread dysentery. And before long Ney's corps was so depleted as to give the impression of having been through a first-class engagement.

Its state was typical of the whole army, and the only means of saving power was to go into quarters. Ney welcomed the respite from tropical marching, and fixed camp, between the 1st and 4th Corps, at a part of the line that practically centred on the village of Łozna.

The resumption of operations pointed to a march on Smolensk, from which a choice of ways opened to the Grand Army. But meanwhile, as a result of Jerome's



hesitation, the two Russian armies joined hands, and Napoleon seized the chance of forcing a battle.

This change of plan meant that cantonments were not broken until August 10th. Three days later Ney, who was close behind Murat's horsemen, crossed the Dnieper on a line extending from the south-west, and proceeded towards Krasnoi. The 15th was Napoleon's birthday (to some in that heterogeneous collection it may also have been the Feast of the Assumption), and Ney and Murat celebrated the former event with a salute of one hundred guns. They were promptly cursed by the realistic Emperor for wasting powder, but some hours later they bombarded Krasnoi without the risk of being reprimanded. Foot and horse then smashed through the town and routed a rear-guard of the Russians, whose main force retreated to Smolensk.

It was bright dawn on the 17th when a gleam of cupolas and low-walled towers, fronted by the Dnieper, showed the 3rd Corps to be within striking distance. A few old guns threatened from the crazy ramparts, and with broken ground promising well for the attack Ney judged that a preliminary bombardment, followed by an infantry rush, would settle the defenders. There was more in Smolensk, however, than met the eye, and the French attack was repulsed with heavy loss. A well-directed bullet had taken skin from Ney's neck before he called off the action, which ended with an exchange of musketry between rampart and outpost.

Was this the entire Russian army covering the town, or a powerful detachment? The Marshal made a reconnaissance in person from a wooded slope commanding a sweep of plain, with the winding Dnieper and the mingled haze of Smolensk as landmarks. Before his eyes an apparently low-lying cloud on the western rim resolved into a welter of dust, with here and there a transient gleam picked out by the sunlight. It was the joint force of Barclay and Bagration, and at once the long-expected battle appeared to Ney as a coming reality.

He summoned the Emperor, who turned his glass on the dust clouds with the exclamation: 'At last I have them!' And so it seemed that Russia was about to yield her burden of inscrutability. For some way ahead the ground was flat and without cover, which Napoleon attempted to utilize by forming Ney's corps, together with the 1st and 4th, in a line of defence which would entail a Russian advance over the levels.

But the attack was not to be hurried. It stopped short at the river crossings, although the French sent bodies of light troops down to the bank as a bait for skirmishers. The sun reddened and sank, but Napoleon still trusted to come to grips on the morrow. Ney thought otherwise, however, and expressed his opinion at a council in the Emperor's tent. If the Russians had meant to fight, they would have done so without delaying. And at dawn, when the cavalry patrols pushed forward, his judgment was verified. For the Russian columns were trailing out of Smolensk into the endless east. The Grey Spectre was still potent.

It influenced Napoleon, whose rage and disappointment drove him on to attack the partly vacated thoroughfares. Ney led the advance under cover of a fierce bombardment, but before an entry could be gained the suburbs had been fired by the retreating army, and the blaze was spreading. The 3rd Corps was played upon by a ruddy reflection as it mounted the incline, silent and cautious, gripped by the intangible menace of ruined streets. Once beyond the rampart they struggled to quench the flames, but little more than a shell remained of Smolensk. It was the 18th of August, and prophetic insight might have found in that limit of ruinous conquest a symbol of the whole fantastic invasion.

But Napoleon's vision was bent upon the image of Moscow. It was a fascination more fatal than a military design, pure and simple, as Ney discovered when he spoke in favour of halting. It was no matter that an occasional man had become barefoot already. The goal

was Moscow . . . and it seemed to Ney that such a decision would prove more injurious to the army than any battle.

Within a few hours of entering Smolensk he received his usual order—to follow in the tracks of Murat's horsemen *en route* for Moscow. He encountered a check on a table-land some miles east of the town, where he estimated a Russian resistance as that of a rear-guard, and promptly attacked. But it turned out to be an entire corps, and Davout had to come to Ney's assistance. This was near sunset, and after a hand-to-hand struggle the Russians drew off in the darkness. Although the French lost some 3,000, the fight at Valutina, as the plateau was called, had been a more satisfactory affair than the occupation of Smolensk. But the Grey Spectre was still in front of the Grand Army.

The march was resumed with Davout's corps serving as advance-guard, while Ney's command, which had so far borne the heaviest losses, dropped back to the centre of the main body. At this stage the country-side had a more western aspect, but although habitations and villages were plentiful there was no sign of life. Every form of supply was also lacking, while the more important centres were burnt as the Russians vacated. These conditions alone would have spelt hardship for the oncoming men and horses; but there was also the weather, and the days of that August continued at tropical intensity.

The same plan of advance could generally be followed on the wide tracks spreading for the march, guns and transport holding the central roadway, with infantry, and beyond them cavalry, moving along the fields on both sides. Dust was everywhere, beaten up by endless tramping in the parched sand, while tortures of thirst were aggravated by the muddy or dried-up waterways they encountered.

Many of the generals, including Ney, were in favour of postponing the advance till spring. But Napoleon

could not be dissuaded from his obsession (and such it was, rather than policy) for driving the Russians to a standstill and entering Moscow. Ever since the high fever of '96 victory had become a habit, a mood from which his thought could claim no detachment.

Then, almost without a sign of warning, the weather broke. Rain beat the crusting sand into a quagmire. Men whose lips and eyes had latterly known the sting of dust gathered at nightfall over smouldering fires; and acute discomfort was not the deadliest of their sensations. For the marshes might have belonged to another world, strange to their Western intelligence, which could now ponder how far they had come from the vines, how distant were the boulevards! But the spirit of '96 still held eastward, and men trimmed their thoughts in the light of that immortal experience.

The change from this was no less sudden than before, and by September 5th men had forgotten the wet and cold in a new burst of heat. But this was lightened by news of the Russians having come to a halt at the village of Borodino. The dilatory Barclay had been replaced by Kutusoff, who, heavy, fat, and impassible, was waiting to oppose his rather superior numbers of 121,000 men and 640 guns to the Grand Army.

A heavy and listless day preceded the battle. The Russians were holding a curve of hills behind the village, with their right extending to the River Moscowa and several redoubts adding to the naturally formidable approach of a marshy front. Ney's corps, in the centre of the French line, faced one of the strongest of these field-works, with low-lying, water-clogged ground and a ridge of pine that was held by Russian outposts threatening his way of advance.

The preparations were followed by a wretched night. There was no moon, a drizzle of rain fell, while a bleak wind blew from the steppe. But another of the sudden changes marked the dawn of September 7th, which flushed the hills to the rear of Borodino and shone in the face of

the Grand Army. Napoleon made a prophetic contrast: 'It is the sun of Austerlitz.'

Yet with the Russian power standing and seventy miles between him and Moscow, he was no longer the man of that epic encounter.

According to plan, Ney's centre was to launch the principal attacks. Overhead the sky was blue and cloudless as each unit filed into position with a display of best uniforms (for the alliance between so fateful a decision and the purely spectacular was brought home to men on the eastward road), drums beat, and the Emperor's proclamation was read. Beyond this coming victory, ran its message, was Moscow, which for the individual implied good provisions and winter quarters. It was now for the artillery to give the advance signal. But two hours passed, an eternity to regiments with nerves at the pitch of standing under arms. And for the first time men could judge that the infallible staff work was creaking.

Ney was soon raging with impatience, and sent to headquarters for permission to clear the wood that fronted his position. But before it arrived there were sounds that the French left was already manœuvring, and Ney promptly extended the action by swinging his advanced line forward. Borodino was not a day of tactics or strategy but of fierce frontal encounters, with bayonet, handspike, and swab crossing as the French attack surged round the batteries. From early morning till dusk the superb infantry went forward, sheer into the hollow that gave upon the redoubts and palled by an artillery smoke whose din could be heard in far-off Moscow, with Ney and his 3rd Corps drawing the bulk of that terrific deluge.

From clearing the dip he reinforced the attack that Davout, supported by cavalry, was launching on the crest to his right. This was held by Bagration, whose defences were the scene of prolonged slaughter, being captured, lost, and taken again by the French in the course of the morning. Elsewhere the Russians had lost ground

on the left, but their right and the central position of the largest of the redoubts were still firm.

In spite of severe counter-attacks the French were secure on the crest they had consolidated by noon, and Ney directed his re-formed attack upon the Great Redoubt. Many columns had withered before its muster of cannon, and after successive charges Ney ordered his men to lie down for cover. But he never dismounted from his white horse (itself a capital target), sitting like a statue under the hail except to replenish the quid of tobacco in his mouth, which he chewed nonchalantly.

There was not much longer of daylight, and the Great Redoubt continued to blaze defiance. Presently some one asked why the Guard had not been sent into action, a query that bore upon the state and conduct of Napoleon during the battle. It was obvious to those about him that the Emperor was unwell. He had not slept the preceding night and was feverish. The saddle pained him, and now and again he stood to rest his head on a near-by cannon. So much can be determined by a knowledge of the course of that day's action, which devolved upon the Emperor's staff and bears no sign of his genius.

But, whatever the irritation (and some may roughly call it a cold), it produced a state of nervous anxiety on behalf of the Imperial Guard. Had it not proved the decisive factor in many a battle? And here were the fortunes of the Empire stranded at the devil's own distance in the heart of a barren enigma. He must husband the Guard, at all costs, as a guarantee for the future. There was a sentiment akin to feminine care in his subsequent order for the distribution of extra rice and biscuits among his guardsmen.

It was therefore like touching a nerve when Ney and the other Marshals sent word that the Guard were wanted. 'The day can be won without them. What if there should be another battle to-morrow?' replied Napoleon. But the fight thickened about the centre, and another

messenger carried the same request from the Marshals, who were then told that the hour of the battle had not yet struck. 'It will begin in two hours more,' prophesied the Emperor.

Two hours, when the Marshals who were on the spot estimated that the weight of a reserve at *this* juncture was necessary for a win, otherwise the day would lapse to an indecision! Then let a portion of the Guard go forward! Napoleon knew how impatient the Bearskins were under their discipline, having stood to arms since the early hours without firing a shot. But Bessières, who also favoured caution, was at hand with a timely: 'Eight hundred miles from Paris!' It was the psychological moment . . . and a final refusal reached Ney and Murat in the carnage about the field-work.

It loosened the devil in Ney, who had already wondered why Napoleon kept to the rear (he was at the unusual distance of a mile from the line), and at the uncertainty of his orders. Death and furies! he stormed, let the Emperor go back to the Tuileries, and leave the commanding to soldiers. Was he no longer a general? Did he want to play the Emperor on every occasion? 'Carrots' was beside himself, but Murat, who was probably glad of the chance to correct his rival, remarked that the Emperor's being unwell increased his demands upon them.

In point of fact, it was the Gascon's cavalry which stormed the Great Redoubt and silenced the cannon. But when the action died down at sunset, with over 60,000 of both sides left on the field, the issue was undecided. It is true that the Russians retired, but they did so in tolerable order. And the menace was still beyond and in front of the Grand Army, which by this time could hardly muster 100,000 effectives.

There was no sign of the main Russian columns at daybreak; only the tireless Cossacks, who made a fringe between the French vanguard and the bare horizon. Moscow was at the end of a long march, and the way was

clear. But for all that the invaders were melancholy. Ney received a further title, Prince of the Moscowa, for his share in the battle, which the bulletins of Napoleon and Kutusoff equally claimed as a victory.

Prince of the Moscowa, and behind him was the coopeerage at Saarlouis! But it needed more than a title to compensate for the shadows that were lengthening over the Grand Army, its epic that was too prolonged for fortune, the adventure that was perilously near the fantastic, the drums, colours, and the mounted Eagles, the clean steel and rumbling cannon, the cap and bearskin, the helmet and cuirass that stood in squares or broke into flashing squadrons, the plumes and cocked hats of the Marshals, the green uniform and the grey surtout, the legend of the Guard and the irresistible cavalry, the chorus of the Sambre-et-Meuse, fading and gone the way of all great hosts, the hot breathing of '96, the rumour that was Valmy, the background of a spectral Liberty, the red platform and waving tricolour, the challenge of a humanity, uplifted by torment, to creed and formula, oath and loyalty, heat and cold, storm and drought, all manner of meeting death.

These were the burdens he had undertaken from the moment (how many years back!) when he had first slipped into his hussar's tunic and known the pride that comes of a swinging dolman. A barren feeling, both on his own part and the massed mind of the hungry, bootless crowd that straggled eastward. For yesterday he had cursed Napoleon in front of his men. Where was the reverence he had once felt for the young man of Italy and the Pyramids, the hero of Brumaire? Where—but enough of Michel Ney, and his Russian sickness! Look at the Emperor himself! Was it not a fact that riding over the field of Borodino his horse had trodden upon a wounded man, and the Emperor screamed? The same as a frightened woman. Not that pity as a sentiment, but the mere showing of nerves, was out of place in the Grand Army. And to-morrow some Cossack pony might be trampling



the highest awards of the Empire. Useless prisoners had been shot in the East, and good Frenchmen poisoned. It was stern necessity on one hand and mercy on the other, but War, just the same, even as Borodino.

That was a field! No use hiding the fact that the Grand Army had never before marched *away* from such a nightmare. The Russians had been saved from their part of the cleaning up by retiring, and as for the French—it was no longer morning with them. Twenty-five thousand down between dawn and sunset, the rest shaken, terribly fatigued, only heartened by a colossal mirage. The injured were like to do badly for several days. As for the dead, there had been no time to give them holes, no stuff for covering. Bare under grey sky, many wounds and many weapons together. Many different tongues, too, if ever they knew resurrection. French from the four boundaries, Russian from the thousand odd corners that the country surely possessed, familiar German and mystifying Italian. . . .

‘Moscow!’ The word had gained from a whisper among the advance-guard to a shout that ran like wind down the marching columns. ‘Moscow!’ For a moment the men wondered. Then they knew that they had come to The City. It was the 14th day of September.

Looking down from the westward hills, whitened by a premature snowfall, it seemed to Ney that a great hollow, filled with a myriad shapes, reflected a still more numerous assembly of tints and colours. It was as though the keenly translucent air imparted its own quality to the dip of landscape, diversely figured and blended like a painter’s palette, with countless spires dominating the medley and pinnacles drifting from gleaming mist to grey as the light wavered.

There, in every line that rose to the horizon, at every clustering point, was the tradition of a people, the wealth of the Tsars. Murat’s cavalry was already scouring the streets; and the early reports that reached Ney, whose corps was not among those to enter the city but remained

on the hills, were strange and vaguely unassuring, as though the mystery that was Russia extended from the void to the thoroughfares.

For Moscow was deserted, utterly silent, and with only the presence of buildings to proclaim its difference from the ashen levels of the past months. Of all the strange and remote goals encountered by the French Army, Moscow was the city of impressions, silent with a heaviness that was yet a suspicion of recent sound, dead and unpeopled, yet with hints of a scarcely departed life mocking the empty stillness.

Was there nothing, no one in the houses, asked the watchers of the 3rd Corps? They were told that shrines and altars in some of the churches were even now yellow with candle-light, the aspect of a devotion whose most likely intent was the downfall of the Eagles; while since an abandoned city meant free wine a few drunkards had been found on the streets. There was plunder, obviously, and the flight of the citizens was a sanction for licence among the invaders. But as for signifying Russia or yielding up the portents of Tsardom, Moscow, the dream city of the Little Corporal's greatest effort, was the quintessence of dust, tomb-like.

That night fell moonless but free of cloud, with a wind freshening the hills where Ney's corps bivouacked. The Marshal had barely retired when he was roused by an alarm of fire, of several outbreaks, having occurred in the city. Flames were discernible from the hill-side, stabbing the clear darkness at various points and defeating the work to overcome them till near morning, when showers of sparks and a dense smoke hid the gilded reflection.

It was no chance or isolated occurrence, for during the six days and nights that followed fires were intermittent, casting their glow to Ney's camp on the outskirts and followed by reports of their latest effect upon the city. The fires were deliberate acts on the part of Russians who had remained in hiding; some had been caught and shot

as a warning to others; fragments of burning wreckage had fallen in the courtyard of the Kremlin, singeing the Emperor's coat, his hair and hands even.

But more persistent rumours told how pride, or discipline, as soldiers understand it, was ceasing to inspire the Grand Army. Ney had an instance to hand in the state of his own corps, wasted by sickness and battle, the torturing monotony of a march, fantastic as a crusade, whose end was likely failure. A bare 8,000 remained in foot, horse, and gunners of the units he had led across the Niemen, but these were enough to murmur in envy of the relaxation that was known to prevail in Moscow.

For down there was plunder, the lot of more fortunate comrades, while they were forbidden to leave the hills where absence of spoil made it possible to preserve a semblance of routine and order. The murmurs grew; and it was not long before Ney realized that he and his officers must wink at many things if the 3rd Corps was to continue without serious trouble. Thus it was permitted for parties from each regiment to leave camp and join in the ransack, after which the proceeds were divided.

Strange and ironic spectacles occurred with the hoarding of furniture, gold and silver articles, jewels, costly furs, rugs and shawls by men who were yet barefoot, and who, while sickened by a surfeit of sugar, jam, and liqueurs, all of which could be had for the grasping, were nearly famished for want of meat or a ration of flour. One of the veterans discovered an unknown substance which apparently imparted a shine and forthwith daubed it over his boots. An officer arrived barely in time to rescue the 'polish', which was caviare; but all the same, black bread would have been more welcome.

It was frankly admitted by Ney, and most of the senior officers, that any further move was out of the question. Some doubted their ability to remain in Moscow under present conditions, while apart from the bare waste, and the coming of winter, the unbroken Russian army now

stood between them and safety. At one moment the Emperor had thoughts of pushing on to St. Petersburg; next he attempted to negotiate with the Tsar. But a blind confidence in his destiny still persisted, though regiments were losing form, few men carried arms, a respect for rank was no longer observed, while a warning was to be seen in the flights of carrion crows shadowing the wreckage.

At the end of September Ney was ordered to move his corps to the Vladimir suburb, a spot on the north-east of Moscow undamaged by the recent burning. A number of stragglers and wounded had come in, bringing his command to a total of 10,000, with the usual scarcity of horses resulting from lack of forage.

It was no victorious entry, riding at the head of his compact 'old moustaches' (such as he had made through how many European cities!), that march between the smoke-blackened shells which represented their hold upon the Russias. Here and there a few figures, derelict inhabitants, raked among the ruins for food. Ney collected a band of these and made them over to one of the French stations, where he was told (such was the precariousness of life amid the wreckage) that it would have been less trouble to shoot them.

October came in with a promise of bleak winter. On the 13th, a Tuesday, a powder of snowflakes filled the air for a few minutes, no more, but it was ominous as the first fall they had encountered that season. This was counteracted, however, by a general improvement in the spirit of the French. It was hoped that Napoleon's advances to the Tsar would end in peace, and in order to encourage the impression a series of reviews were held in the courtyard of the Kremlin.

The Imperial Guard could safely be reckoned on to present the finest appearance, for everywhere, even in the wilderness of Moscow, the first picking of each rag, garbage, and shelter went to the Bearskins. But Ney's corps determined to parade as a good second, and well

it succeeded. The 17th was spent in preparing, and next day they marched to the ground with uniforms as near trim as possible, muskets clean, steel bright, and every bit of brass depicting a generous usage of spittle, polish, and willing elbows.

That 18th was a Sunday. Marshal Ney wheeled his charger into the courtyard, and as the 3rd Corps with Eagles well mounted and arms level took up position, it seemed as though the glory of the Empire had come again. For nothing less than an invincible, if not eternal spirit, could have inspired that restoration of order from rank misery, of pride and military alertness from hunger and deadly fatigue.

The officers dismounted and the men stood easily, awaiting inspection. Suddenly a booming echo was heard, and they exchanged glances. It was gunfire, somewhere in the south, yet who was fighting? What of the peace negotiations?

But silence, here was Napoleon! They knew their paces, those veterans, the measured yet seemingly impatient step, the regular swing, the old cue for enthusiasm. 'Vive l'Empereur!' Could it soar to the drab Moscow skies, where snow was gathering? 'Vive l'Empereur!' He was speaking, congratulating the Marshal on his fine corps. And now was the distribution of crosses, with a friendly word for the men who received them, a look that comprehended the whole parade. 'Vive——'

A horseman, dashing into the first court with no more ceremony than belonged to the field! News from the south, the region whence an unexpected gunfire had reached the Kremlin. Napoleon reads, and men notice that his face is not the same after. Cause enough, for the message means that Murat has been attacked, beaten, and nearly cut off from Moscow. Then the peace hopes? Dashed, my friend. The Tsar has spoken.

Once more the parade springs to attention, this time for dismissal. And now how delusive, it can be seen, was the first appearance of smartness that buoyed it on

entering the courtyard. There are no companies, but squadrons, no regiments, but meagre battalions. These men should be mounted, save that their horses have dropped dead and there are no more studs or forage to be had in Moscow. As for the gun-teams, a scratch assembly and hardly got, drooping in neck and flanks.

And look more closely at the men who marched as though in the heyday of the Empire. They did it on broken boots, while their faces mirror starvation. Not a few should have been in hospital, or it may be they have just come from there so loud were the drums and music that Sunday morning. Such scarecrows would be laughed at in Paris, where a man's suffering may be turned into humour. Paris! How many of the little crosses that had just been aired would ever be carried with a swagger down the boulevards? Precious few, old grumblers. You heard the Russian reply. It had been in volleys.

A Marshal of France rode forty paces ahead of his men. But the sound of their tramping reached Ney in more softened form than usual on that melancholy return to quarters. For it was again snowing, somewhat thicker, and the roads were white with menace of wintry peace.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE IMMORTAL REAR-GUARD

AN inhabitant of the Vladimir suburb on that same day (October 18th) would have noted unusual stirrings among Ney's corps, which had barely returned from the parade ground. For amid the shouts and clatter of military preparation arms and supplies were being collected, transports loaded, the gun-teams harnessed again as well as possible; superfluous baggage and belongings were burnt in heaps that sent a glow through the spreading darkness, and by this unearthly reflection the regiments began to assemble.

They knew what order had led to this sudden move. Moscow, the prize of their pilgrimage, was to be abandoned. They had exhausted the possibilities of the waste, and now only France was behind them. Incidentally there were hostile forces to be encountered, and the more vital threat of a Russian winter. But the Grand Army, in spite of heavy losses, was still a modern tradition, with the horrors of retreat and rout in no man's thought of the future.

That night it will never be wholly dark in the street, for fires appear in every direction. Ney's corps has completed its loading, and stands to arms shortly after midnight. Overhead it is starry with a crystalline splendour that makes cold contrast to the ruddy flaming of dump and wreckage. The colonels take position at the head of their regiments, and the drummer's sticks are poised for the rattle that leads them off as the frozen hills to the eastward begin to brighten.

Each column, apart from its normal complement of wagons, was intersected by strings of carriages, hand-carts, and every type of vehicle found in Moscow. This lent an incongruous air to the discipline which had fairly

returned now that operations were again in progress, for the army had been ragged or starving before, but never so encumbered. The signs of a coming disintegration may thus have been apparent in the stream that wended through the southern barrier and beat due south in the direction of Kaluga, which march indicated the western route instead of the more direct northern way by which they had entered.

There was good reason for such a change. If executed in time it would leave the French a clear drive round Kutusoff's flank, and between the lines of union he was near effecting with another Russian force from the westward. Ney was again deputed to play for time and cover these moves from the enemy, and during the first few days of the retirement he interposed as a screen for the main columns while holding off the Cossack raiders.

But meanwhile Kutusoff had fathomed the French plan for marching, by the western way, to Kaluga, and promptly swung out a parallel line to cover their objective. There was a sharp but indecisive engagement, which left Napoleon with no choice, now that his scheme had failed, but to fall back on the northern road for Smolensk. He was obeying necessity.

Ney received orders to follow, and set out in the dark hours of October 23rd. Head-quarters were at Borovsk, where he arrived three days later after a dismal struggle through the wilds. For the surrounding country was roadless and reduced to a quagmire by heavy rains, the weather had been raw cold, while the Cossack sting was never absent from flank or rear.

From Borovsk, Ney continued his retreat with the main army. And now was a melancholy period, of savage, silent marching on the part of the men while a cynical disregard shielded the authority of their commanders, one and all reacting to the consciousness of the last throw having been lost and of a star that had dimmed on the flanking march to Kaluga.



The weather, by one of the sudden changes to which they had grown accustomed, mocked them with fugitive gleams of a past season. Daylight was far shortened by the setting of a great sun, but a warm and mellow mist hung over the firm roads with their brown scattering of leaves. Beyond them the rolling plain extended a fringe of wood to the horizon, clearly lined through the haze of an autumn sunset, an atmosphere that promised well for the march or bivouac. But the Grand Army knew that its prime had been accomplished, and the measure filled. Now it was turning back to the beginning, the ebb was seeking the source of that tidal inspiration.

A bird's-eye view would have shown the columns, from van- to rear-guard, sagging and becoming more irregular every day. Here and there, overcome by hunger or weariness, a man dropped out from the ranks which continued plodding (there was no time or chance for succouring the least resistant), while the Cossack spears flashed down on a new victim. For swarms of wild Russian cavalry still kept pace with the other miseries of the French, who avenged their intolerable strain by knocking in the heads of the prisoners who collapsed or firing the villages.

Every mile covered of the desolate track meant the failing of more horses, and the further loss of transport. It was soon a common enough sight to encounter an abandoned wagon with its company of broken-down bodies, but there was yet another token of disaster which, when first seen by Ney, drew a blush to his hardened cheeks. This was a piece of artillery, one of Napoleon's 'beautiful daughters', left by the way because there was no team to draw it. Ney had never been a gunner, but he knew that the limit of glory was reached when the Grand Army gave up its cannon.

On the 29th he re-crossed the battle-ground of Borodino. It was a field of skeletons, for no burial parties were in attendance at the Russian campaign. And the 3rd Corps marched without pause or turn to its bivouacs

on the west of the ghostly site. Next day his men discovered some fugitives, who had been wounded during the battle of September 7th and left behind in a hastily converted hospital, where there was less food than vermin. Such things were a stringent, ghoulisn reflection on Ney's dream of war, with its lustre and ringing burdens; but still, less perturbing than the picture of teamless cannon.

Some hours more of monotonous plodding, after which, on November 1st, Ney reached the town of Viasma. Here the retreating inhabitants had not been so thorough in their usual work of destruction, and it was possible for some of the 3rd Corps to exchange the open for a roof shelter at night. But barely a day's rest was possible, for it came to hand that the Russians had forced a wedge between Ney and the two rearmost corps, which were now striving to win through to his present position.

It was imperative for Ney to hold on, and he did so at the cost of a hard day's fighting on the 3rd, when he beat off several assaults. By nightfall he was firmly established, while contact was regained with the corps which had been threatened and later burst a way through the Russian barrier. There was still an epoch of fight in the Grand Army, for all its apparent disorder and the sullen days darkening its passage.

For although the November cold was not yet continuous there was no longer a misty sun to gild the marsh and woodland ahead of the retiring columns. Grey weather was settling down, and the nights of fourteen or fifteen hours were growing longer. But notwithstanding the plight and peril of its human element, the Retreat was on the point of being raised to an immortal venture. For such was the legacy of the Revolution, a belief in the power derived from chaos and in death as the inspiration of life, by which the Grand Army claimed an existence.

The form of this was the giving of an order, to the

effect that Ney's corps was to replace the 4th in the post of rear-guard. Henceforth the campaign of 1812 was to become a legend with the cooper's son from Saarlouis as its central figure, and his superhuman endurance numbered with the virtues of all Great Hosts since the Legions first marched from the Tiber.

His immediate task was to hold the woods and river-side while the rest of the army passed through on its way from Viasma. But Ney's principal concern on that day, the 4th, was not fighting. He was given a glimpse of the fate that overtook a rear-guard during the Retreat, when the wreckage of the 1st and 4th Corps, which until then had been the hindmost, drifted between his sheltering lines. And if the sight of deserted cannon had been tragic this was pitiful.

There was no pretence of formation or battalion order. Crowds of men were on the move, staggering for the most part and broken beyond their recognition as soldiers. Not many carried arms but all were in rags and emaciated, and now, after days of intermittent action, the entry into pine-woods seemed a promise of shelter. They dropped in dozens, sleeping as they fell, and no curse or command, not even the certainty of a Cossack spear at daybreak, could rouse them.

Ney was shocked. His orthodox vision had not reckoned upon such depths as being within the range of valid discipline. Next day he pushed on, with his 3rd Corps now in the rear of the retirement. The halt at Viasma had given time for many stragglers to come up, and these now pressed upon his ranks, calling for food and safety in their haphazard need of dependence. No use, came back the answer; we are better provided than you only in appearance. We can give you nothing but the room for marching or fighting. Yet still they clamoured (so delusive is the spell of potency over the less capable), impeding the movement of the ranks until there was nothing for it but to drive them off, forcibly, with musket-butts where needed. And by the time the

rear-guard was finally in motion again the Cossacks had put an end to the stragglers.

It was early that night when the Grand Army felt the coming of its last and most terrible enemy,—the cold. There was a sudden blanket of fog that sharpened the indrawn breath, and many of those yet able to sleep were killed by its biting intensity. Winter was coming in a form unknown to Western experience, and its first touch, on that 5th of November, was fatal to the Grand Army.

Its first touch, remember, and within a few hours it was palpably more severe. A heavy fall of snow blotted earth and heaven, and men with senses not wholly numb could wonder at the size of the flakes. Under their covering the landscape lost its features with the merging of plain, wood, and frozen stream in the same structure of whiteness. Men walked as though in an icy envelope, and the nights, swept by a bitter wind that made fires almost impossible, had lengthened to sixteen hours. Frozen groups gathered for a meal of rye and flour mixed with snow water. Always there were Cossacks, stabbing at the rear or encircling the flanks, while pursuing artillery opened at close range under the darkness. And so they struggled on to the banks of the Dnieper, beyond which lay Smolensk.

Ney must fight here to cover the main crossing. Hold off the well-fed and equipped thousands with his starving handful, depleted at every turn by wounds or exhaustion, and no one picked up by the way! Can he wonder that the pitiful defence cracks at the first strain, and the counter-attack withers? But he must curse some one to recompense for his further losses, so blames the officers, although they can hardly be distinguished from the scarecrows of the rank-and-file. Then on to Solovievo where he crosses the Dnieper, leaving a trail of dead and yet living bodies behind him.

Already he has learnt much from being in the post of danger. The retirement must be hurried if even the

wreckage of the Grand Army is to be saved. A few days ago the desertion of a single trophy had shamed him, but now he was for leaving behind the less serviceable guns and most of the transport. The peril must be brought home to Napoleon, and he sends a rider with news of the state of the rear-guard. But the Emperor, with a return of the sensitiveness that followed Borodino, cuts short the recital: 'Colonel, I did not ask you for these details.'

The retreat winds onward, its pace not accelerated by a wholesale sacrifice of the convoy. And a frequent echo from the rear tells of Ney covering his own disasters and the passage of the Grand Army with a hollow but desperate resistance.

That startling change to winter on the 5th had been mild compared to the weather of these days. A violent wind carried the snow in dense clouds that practically shut out vision. Men, their arms and equipment scattered, sank waist-deep in the drifts, with an ever increasing trail of dead and dying as the miles lengthened. Every horse that fell was set upon by the soldiers and its skin stripped off for covering, while not even the blood was wasted. It was rich warm liquor to the freezing. The sites of hasty bivouacs on these fearful nights could be determined next day by a circle of frozen men, soon showing as separate white hillocks when the snow gathered, to be raked and torn by batches of hungry ravens. And the following corps in passing found no more than a few cap-plates to tell them of which of the Empire's units it was the graveyard.

Ney was in close action again on the 11th, when he finally crossed the Dnieper with further losses of guns and transport. Beyond was a stretch of pine-wood extending to the eastern border of Smolensk, which the ruin of his corps entered on the 14th. Of the 10,000 who had simulated so brave a front at the Moscow review, but 3,000 were standing. Only twelve guns could be moved, and that with difficulty, while ammunition was

giving out. His mounted force was less than a single squadron. Such was the toll exacted by the honourable post of rear-guard to the Grand Army.

Moreover his corps, by reason of its position, was the worst provided in whatever chances remained of distributing the remnant of flour and the failing horse-flesh. And within a few hours of entering Smolensk he was called upon again to take up a covering position as the army was leaving. Haste was necessary in order to reach the Beresina crossing, its next point of crisis, before the Russians who were moving up from the south.

That night the sentries of the rear-guard were almost driven from their stations by the torturing cold. But they stood to it, as did the rest of the corps when the attack developed about daybreak. By a miracle of fighting the evacuation was made secure, and although forced to abandon more guns, wagons, and wounded on the 17th, when the 3rd Corps marched from Smolensk, the demonstration had shown Ney that the fighting power of his men could even yet surmount the physical. This was the very stuff of the Grand Army. Numbers were also growing with the constant arrival of stragglers until he was leading a good 5,000. But the guns had lessened to six, while only a bunch remained of the part-squadron of cavalry.

There was an incident when the last detachments moved out of Smolensk. Among them was the 'love escort', women, often with children, who were transported on sledges. On one of the most crowded was a boy, aged about five, whose mother pushed him off into the snow. Twice this happened, and each time the Marshal replaced the child with his own hands. Finally the woman was left behind, and the child passed to another.

Ney had retarded his own movement by a show of obstinate bravery. For on being warned by Davout, who was told off to wreck the ramparts before leaving, that his operation would impede the tail of the columns,

Ney had sworn that 'not all the Cossacks in the world should prevent him from carrying out instructions'. Later he was to blame Davout for retiring in such fashion as to leave him stranded. But the real cause was a Russian threat to the main flank, by which Kutusoff almost succeeded in dividing the French corps as they made for the Beresina. They could only avoid the trap by hurrying, which was the military equivalent for dooming Ney to a separate annihilation.

He was, of course, ignorant of this when he set out for Krasnoi. The weather was milder, with foggy damp and slush covering the hardened roadway. But the wastage still continued. Among his command, two men held constantly together; they were the 4th Regiment.

It was the same story of painful marching, Cossack raids, and occasional volleys to protect flank and rear. A so-called division of the 1st Corps, under General Ricard, had been cut off near Krasnoi, and with this addition to his force Ney continued over the levels. The fog deepened; scouting was impossible. Even had landmarks existed they would have signified nothing. Then suddenly the leading files came to a halt. A dark compact mass had loomed through the dimness shadowing the plain, and the French recoiled, startled, before fully grasping its meaning.

But a second glance was sufficient to show that all such movement was futile. They were face to face with a Russian force, 80,000 strong and 200 pieces of artillery.

One overwhelming attack, and Ney's rear-guard would cease to exist. But the Russians were sure enough of victory, apart from the knowledge that the 3rd Corps was now isolated, to give it a chance of yielding. An officer, under a white flag, rode to the French lines, and Ney received his message. 'Go back to those who sent you,' he answered, 'and tell them that a Marshal of France cannot surrender.' He was reminded that a refusal could only lead to the useless slaughter of brave men whose position, with the odds against them and

the Grand Army hustling for its very life, was now hopeless. Had not he (the Russian), a sufficient sense of Ney's reputation to keep within honourable necessity? Finally a brief truce was arranged, while Ney sent an officer to verify their reported situation.

At that moment, however, one of the Russian batteries opened fire. The reason was unknown but Ney, still smarting from the call to surrender, availed himself of a formal military interpretation. 'You are a prisoner, sir,' he told the envoy. 'Your people have fired upon us while you are in our lines, which forfeits the protection of your white flag.' It was no use the officer protesting. His sword was taken, and for nearly a month one perfect uniform and a sleek mount figured in the fortunes of the tattered rear-guard.

Ney hastily summed up his chances. Eighty thousand Russians and 200 guns on one side: the fog and a handful of more or less fugitives on the other. Could he incite confusion, and a break-through? The mere thought was madness, but so was the memory of that rash successful 'pouring of wine' at Jena. The Grand Army could never exceed its own reckless capacity. Besides, that invitation to surrender! From a boor of a Russian general to Michel Ney, who had once jogged in the Revolutionary saddle, and was now of the Empire!

Not all his ragged followers stood out in the gradual darkness; but now, such as they were, he led them forward.

For more than twenty minutes they endured discharges of grapeshot, forty in all, and at close quarters a frontal bayonet charge, and sabring on either flank. That the wreckage even held was due to Ney's sheer desperation of effort. Then the fog closed, sheltering that awful sublimity, and the hunting passed to the Cossacks.

Somewhere on the plain the survivors gathered. Two weak parties now, with one man left to parade the badge of the 4th Regiment. Hitherto the Retreat as an



operation had been signified by the fate of the rear-guard; but from this point the campaign of 1812 means Marshal Ney, and Ney only. For with the slightest hint that his iron will was failing, collapse would have been certain. His words were being weighed, and his features watched, for a betrayal of resolution. It would have brought relief to his broken band had he weakened, for the present ordeal and the chances of extrication were surely beyond nature. But his command continued by virtue of a spirit that was more inflexible than the surrounding horrors. He was the pillar of the rear-guard, taciturn, as during the whole of the Retreat, but so long as his inspiration bade them endure no man was utterly abandoned.

In answer to their silent inquiry, he ordered an immediate march back to Smolensk. There was astonishment (for why needlessly retrace their steps, and what of the pursuit?), but none voiced a question. It was felt that the Marshal had somehow come to the only possible decision. The return was made in silence. But if Ney had a plan his also was the burden of responsibility, and at last he was driven, by human need, to share it.

An officer, pacing alongside the Marshal, was suddenly aware that he had drawn closer. 'It is not well with us.' The officer turned, asking his intention. 'To get to the other side of the Dnieper.' Simple enough in words, but where was the direction? 'We shall find it.' Even then, persisted the officer, supposing it is not frozen over? 'It will be,' concluded Ney. Such confidence was equal to Napoleon's statement, that the word 'impossible' existed only in the dictionary of fools.

Allowing for the presence of ice as a means of crossing, a march on the far or northern side of the Dnieper was likely to bring them into contact with the Grand Army. One glance at his rough map and Ney struck deeper into the plains, their first landmark a stream that eventually joined the main river. Here was a hollow which, by clearing away the snow, revealed a surface of ice. It

only remained to break this surface, and follow the under flow to the scene of their crossing.

Darkness fell as they entered a village where, although the Cossacks had struck their trail again, they halted and made fires. Meanwhile a peasant had been found to act as guide, with the result that it still wanted a few hours to midnight when they reached the Dnieper. It was frozen, as Ney had predicted, and choosing a bend of the river as offering the firmest passage they waited for the frost to complete the hardening.

Those three hours of intolerable strain marked the highest point of Ney's example. Few attempted to close an eye, and hardly a man succeeded in losing the sense of their bitter surroundings beyond a scattered oblivion. But the Marshal, with a truly methodical nonchalance, spread his cloak on the whitened bank and was soon sleeping, the most distant of all that weary assembly from the task in hand, of which he was yet the mainspring.

He was astir at midnight, and with a range of fires to show the way the rear-guard began its move over the Dnieper. The ice cracked at the first touch, but finally several points were discovered where crossings could be made in single file. Then came the horses, guns, and wagons, an operation which shattered the thin surface and led to many engulfments. Among them was a transport of wounded who were flung into the freezing water, and Ney, crawling on hands and knees to the aperture, rescued one of the victims. Every impediment had therefore to be left on the south bank, where the last guns were rendered immovable by hastily sawing the trunnions.

It was calculated that two long marches, to the north-west, would bring them up with the Grand Army in the vicinity of Orcha. There was darkness and unknown country ahead of them. They had no horses, transport, or artillery. All that remained of the rear-guard was a small force of foot with muskets and a dwindling supply of cartridges. But it seemed that they had dodged their

pursuers, and after groping for some way almost at hazard they bivouacked in the illimitable pines.

Daylight showed a bordering of stark trees, and the road to Orcha. But other signs were apparent in the snow, which might well have torn the remaining heart from Ney's column. These were horse tracks, evidence that somewhere in the waste, before their objective, were still the Cossacks. And soon they were encountered; not only spearmen to pick off the fugitives but artillery which decimated the plodding handful.

The order of two columns still continued, with General Henin as second-in-command. Soon after dawn, when artillery fire developed, the first of the Cossack charges bore down, and continued, on and off, till near sunset. The brunt of these attacks was borne alternately by the columns, one forming square and offering a bold front while the other gained ground, but at close need they stood together and met the onsets with a cross fire. Parties were strung on either flank to protect the march, but it was fatal to stray too far or fall behind, whatever the wound or obstacle, for their comrades could wait for no one and the Cossack spears kept at the ready.

The pace of the rear-guard was naturally slow, with an occasional halt called between the volleys. Every hour lessened their numbers and ammunition. Flanks and rear were seldom free of the horsemen, while throughout light or darkness the guns were active. This was their normal going for two days, with all men looking to the Marshal for a silent but ultimate assurance. And how any survived, what reserve of Homeric courage held them together, remains a mystery. Certainly its secret is not in words.

Here and there were acts of the careless devotion which partially redeems all manner of tragedy, and not least that of warfare. A man dropped, wounded, and the procedure in which he had shared scores of time since the Retreat now found him a victim. The files, hurriedly swinging apart to avoid him, heard his shout:

'Here's another man done for.' Then, as he awaited the lances: 'Take my knapsack. You'll find it useful.'

All sense of the privilege due to rank had long since vanished. Not that authority was non-existent, for the fact that Ney could still inspire with a superb attitude was virtually a reflection of the Marshalate. But nothing induces a more exact state of democracy than hardship, prolonged and apparently unbearable. It was no longer possible for Ney to encourage by an official address or bulletin. For the lapse of formalism had begun when the first man died of hunger, or the first straggler had been left in the snow. Now he rounded his greatest effort by returning to the ranks, moving from one to the other and leaving an impression that was more forceful than the next surge of danger. With its breaking upon them every officer and man, from Ney to the meanest, was brought to the same fighting level, an equal worth which was that of a potential musket.

There was a moment when it seemed even to Ney that the little band must perish, or surrender. Fatigue had extended from the body to the nerves, and the next charge must surely go to the lancers. But that moment was surmounted and beyond it another, and another. Here was Ney, shouting to his men, who were surprised at their own continuation, that the worst was over.

What, with another wave bearing down upon them? Irresistible this time—the last. But over all the voice of the Marshal, still gloriously lying: 'Comrades, now is the moment. Forward, they are ours!' And so the rear-guard lived, still holding a main course within reach of the river, through woodland and over waterways where the march stumbled until, near sunset on the 19th, they drew breath in a shelter of pines that skirted the Dnieper.

Meanwhile a messenger had been sent on in advance to Orcha, with news that the relic of the 3rd Corps was struggling through. Such hope had long since been

abandoned at head-quarters, where Napoleon exclaimed: 'I have three hundred million francs in my coffers at the Tuileries. I would willingly have given them to save Marshal Ney.' With the arrival of the messenger a force set out under Prince Eugène (Beauharnais, the Emperor's stepson), halting at intervals in the darkness to fire artillery signals, which in time were answered by the distant rattle of musketry; for the rear-guard had lost its cannon.

A few more signals, the two columns sighted each other, and Ney, 'The Bravest of the Brave', as Napoleon was to call him, had flung himself into the arms of his reliever. The remnant of his corps now stood at somewhat over 800 infantry. Whole regiments had ceased to exist. Gradually their individual consciousness returned to the survivors, and with it came a strange mingling of wonder. By what strength had they endured, how followed the Marshal so implicitly through the most savage and fantastic of all the long Revolutionary efforts? For even so must the burden of every strain appear in retrospect, with each man taking stock of his own capacity. Each man, that is, apart from the leader, for whom there can be no secret or mystery of inspiration beyond the knowledge of a mortality as faint and querulous as those which yet regard him as a different order of being.

Conditions in Orcha were a bare improvement upon those of the desert. Napoleon might welcome the rear-guard, and speak of its extrication as being a good augury for the remaining columns. But the supplies there had been apportioned long before Ney's arrival, and only a short rest could be taken as the Russians were moving westward to close the crossing of the Beresina. In addition Ney had resumed his grievance against Davout, to whose mode of retirement he attributed his recent disasters.

This was unjust, for Davout had fought like a devil every inch of the way to Orcha, and reached there

frosted from head to foot and minus a shirt. He tried to explain but Ney cut him short, turning on his heel with a final: 'As for me, Monsieur le Maréchal, I do not reproach you. God sees us, and will judge.'

He was not reinforced, and marched his 800 out from Orcha on the following day, November 20th. The immediate goal was a reach of the Beresina river, near Borissov, as the best place for crossing, with a heavy thaw clogging the march on a broad road through mile after mile of woodland. Cold, especially at night, and hunger were still the great enemies, and in less than a week 300 men of Ney's command were dead or broken. Extend this state as being typical of the whole army (increased to some 50,000, as Victor and Oudinot had since come in), together with the fact that three great Russian forces were descending on both flanks and rear, and the terrible happenings at the ford of Studienka read like a miracle.

For if ever, as human sense judges, an army was doomed, it was that which halted on the frosty bank of the Beresina. The odds of man and nature that were allied to prevent its crossing need not be repeated, but there was a last disappointment in so far as the river was not frozen. A bridge was necessary, and pontoniers went down into the icy water, standing chin-deep at the work on plank and trestle till, one by one, they staggered out to die. But the bridge was finished. It was near evening on the 26th, and the Grand Army began its passage to the right bank.

Ney and his corps, now about 600, relieved for the time being from rear-guard duty by Victor, went over after midnight. For two days he remained in bivouac, though even to rest under such conditions meant further losses. All this while the general crossing continued, in good or bad order according to the discipline of the section. Then, on the 28th, a Russian attack developed on both banks. Oudinot, covering the west, was wounded. Victor was holding on to the eastern side

like a bulldog, with bleeding fangs. But sheer weight told against him, and at last the few muskets representing the 3rd Corps were called upon for another effort.

Then was fought the most amazing action ever known to land or sea. It began with Ney leaving a minimum of defence for the nearest bridge-head, and penetrating a belt of woodland to burst with his remnant upon the flank of the Russian masses. Like many another episode of the Retreat, it transcends all description. Darkness fell, and with it there floated upon the bleak air, poignant above the din of that unequal carnage, a sound of singing; men's voices, melancholy with a sense of things remembered and maybe lost. For certain of Ney's company hailed from the western mountains, and their song, as gunfire ripped the shadows, was a farewell to homeland.

I have called the contest, with a seeming triteness, unequal. Yet the victims of that inequality triumphed, and while the Russian attack died down into a cannonade the skeleton assembly of Ney's corps, which had numbered a bare 600 at the commencement, returned with its captures. They were five guns and 4,000 prisoners. In official terms they had saved the Grand Army, or, more correctly, the wreckage which showed that such a power had once existed. Otherwise they had given witness to the vitality, even when Fate was upon it, of the Revolutionary Thing from which the Army had descended, and which those who hold that the dream of a reconstructed Europe is more than legend may claim as a definite tradition, not subject to the accidents of race or language.

The last French column crossed the Beresina on the 29th. A straggling mass of fugitives still remained on the eastern bank, and how, with the breaking of the first pontoon, they surged in panic on to the floating ice, to drown or be massacred by the Cossacks, is not part of Ney's story. The march went on, still menaced from left and right and with constant blows at the rear-guard,

which position was again held by Ney, together with Victor, whom he joined on the 30th.

It might have been thought that the cold had reached a climax, but it was still increasing. Birds froze in the bare trees and fell limply among the rabble of marchers. Even the Guard was unable to preserve its pride of discipline, and numbers who, once having rested, could not renew the struggle, were abandoned at the smouldering bivouacs. It was sometimes possible to sleep resting on a knapsack, elbows on knees and with head cupped in the hands, a position which brought the limbs into warming contact while seeming to cramp away the gnaw of hunger.

Small wonder, then, that humanity was overlaid and the savage returned, except in a few cases among the ranks. For in the end devotion must always become a prerogative of the simplest. Here and there a man could be seen offering a few dry sticks, which were a precious find in the waste, 'for the Emperor's fire'. But the general mood was total insensibility to loss and suffering.

Watch Ney, whose miseries and responsibility have been unequalled, at this most terrible stage of the retirement. To one who brings him news of a staff officer's death he remarks: 'Well, it is better that we should regret him than that he should be regretting us.' A wounded soldier drops in the snow, and to his cry for assistance the Marshal returns a casual: 'What would you have? You are one more victim of war.'

There was good need of hardening, as the Russian attacks were now driven home more fiercely. And once again the highly fantastic encounters of 1812 present themselves as lying beyond the import of any words. Ney, musket in hand, dominating the shattered groups; Ney ordering his trumpeter to sound the 'Charge' at a critical moment, and fooling the enemy into belief that his starved remnant was vital enough to plunge down with the bayonet! Perhaps the most eloquent description of so grotesque a warfare consists in a regular reminder of the numbers at his command. And by the 4th of



December, apart from a few bands straggling to left or right of the main body, his rear-guard had dwindled to sixty.

He expressed his intention to Victor, who was next in the column, of leaving his post for the time being in order to round up survivors. But Victor was anxious to recruit his own 9th Corps by making a similar search, and the two Marshals almost came to blows till Ney consented to stay behind with a suitable reinforcement. The ex-drummer, however, swore that he'd be damned before leaving his fellow Marshal a single man; but the pretty situation was cut short by an order for Ney temporarily to join the head-quarters at Smorgoni.

He there found Napoleon on the point of quitting the army and making a dash for Paris, where, apart from the necessity of raising more men, a plot was forming against the Empire. Murat was given direction of the Retreat, while it fell upon Ney to put up a fight at Vilna for the protection of the main body as it continued on to the Niemen. The stragglers of the 3rd Corps, some hundreds in all, were rounded up, and occupied the eastern part of the town. There was a breathing space and a meagre distribution of rations before the enemy grappled, and finally Ney drew off under cover of darkness, his rear-guard worn to a shadow but still screening the general retirement.

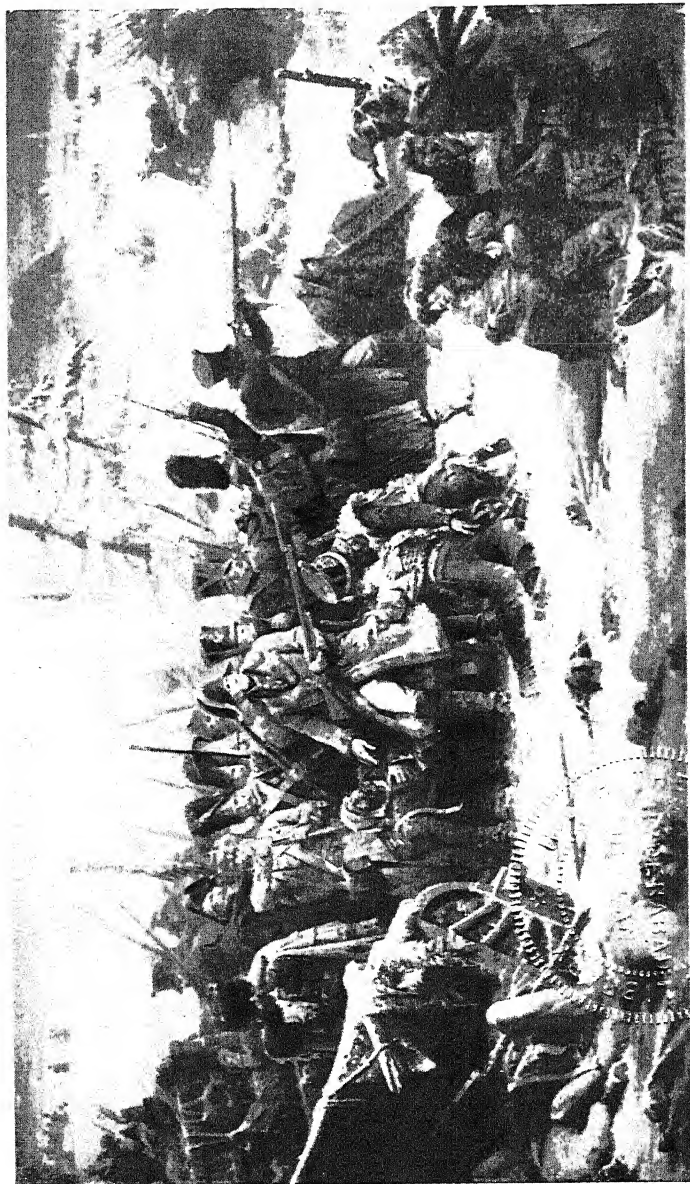
All that night he marched in the direction of Kovno, with breaking-point never absent from the forlorn venture and only his invincible will-power standing between the doubtful rally and the Russian thousands. Fugitives impeded the road, and when commands were unavailing a way had to be cleared with fists or musket until, shortly before daybreak, fatigue compelled them to halt. For some hours his remnant was heavily engaged with the Russian vanguard, preserving its own life and that of the main columns by a repetition of the astonishing fighting that superseded the disasters of 1812, then working on through the darkness.

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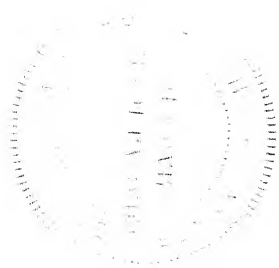
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MARSHAL NEY COVERING THE RETREAT, 1812

*From the Painting by Yvon at Versailles*



One of the methods for gaining ground was to place a wagon, holding shells and powder with a long lighted fuse attached, in the path of retreat, which meant that the Russians awaited the explosion before passing. But between the intervals of stratagem and desperate fighting there was at least one occasion when the rear-guard was literally helpless. It was rendered so by a new spell of cold and the fact that Ney, in company with a Bavarian general, had been cut off for a time in the confusion, and only regained his post to find the men completely demoralized. A single attack would have led to the wiping out of the French now that Ney, their one bulwark, had lost the power of resistance. But the unusual chill had struck home among the Russians, petrifying even the Cossacks; and the ghosts of the Grand Army, without order or discipline, were left free to straggle into Kovno.

There was death in the plundered streets, death by brawling and drinking. For starved bodies and brain were easily overcome by the wine that was found, and where they fell unconscious the cold gripped, killing many. It was to cover such scenes that Ney formed another rear-guard, and with the backing of two guns a fortification was thrown up on the Vilna road. How, time and again, he pressed such material into service, is a question far beyond the scope of his actual authority. Then came a snatch of sleep, from which he was roused by firing and the noise of a Cossack attack on the weakly defended earth-work.

He arrived there just as his companies, too spent for fighting, melted in panic and fled townward. One of the guns was out of action and its commander, unable to effect a rally, had put a bullet through his head. And once again there was nothing between the French and the Russian army but the solitary figure of Ney who, sword in hand, confronted the fugitives, shouting, gesticulating, mingling threat and entreaty till the mad rush was brought to a standstill. Then, taking a musket and calmly choosing ground, he opened fire on the Cossacks.

No man of the Grand Army could have stood by from such an example. Here singly, and there in groups, they took up the fighting, and all that night the streets of Kovno were barred to the Russians. Daylight came, and shone in the faces of thirty men lining the barrier. The latest of Ney's rear-guards had been sacrificed for the preservation of the army, and now the survivors must follow as best they could.

They crossed the river and entered a high road, with their immediate front ending in a wooded plateau. It was generally felt that the worst was over, so that order and a sense of discipline governed the ranks, while a further departure from the unnatural necessity of 1812 was that the wounded, instead of being abandoned, were now dragged on sledges.

Presently a scout returned with news that Cossacks were holding the high ground ahead of them. It was a bitter blow to men who had dared think of relief; but courage! They had surmounted far worse than a Cossack ambush. On they went, prepared to fight a way through the pine-woods, till a sudden gunfire proclaimed the unmasking of the enemy. And with it the brief heart went out of the tattered body, for this was cannon-shot, meaning, that instead of Cossack horsemen, a regular Russian corps had been encountered.

To charge would have been madness, while retreat, with troops before and Cossacks pressing up from the rear, was out of the question. The artillery was opening in full blast, and those few minutes brought the accumulated horror and despair of the Retreat down upon the French, with the sickening rapidity of shot crashing among them. Movement was impossible, fight they could not; so they stretched themselves on the bare ground, the last of an immortal rear-guard, uncaring whether they died or surrendered. But suddenly Ney was seen, striding among the fugitives and shouting orders.

If advance and retreat were likewise out of the question, then, by God, they must outflank the enemy! He

would lead them, making a right wheel through patchy woodland on to the highway beyond, then westward by the Niemen and along the Tilsit road for some distance. And once again the spent rear-guard responded to his almost fabulous inspiration, coolly confident in spite of a last attack by Cossacks, which was beaten off, so that moonrise on December 14th found the survivors of Ney's 3rd Corps saved from annihilation, and with an open march to the frontier before them.

During the next few days stragglers continued to come in, until the total of his command stood at 200, mostly sick or wounded, all that remained of the 37,000 who had tramped through the June dust to people the great mounds rising by the railway track between Vilna and Moscow, the graves of the immortal old grumblers.

Ney should have died with them. It was a hard fate by which he lived to return to France, and so defeat himself. He should have left his body under the snow with the wreckage of the Grand Army, face turned to the goal of a fantastic pilgrimage that was the test of his magnificence, and from which he emerged unbeaten. Between Moscow and the frontier he lost but one Eagle in fighting, and for sheer sustained inequality that fighting beggars description as it does comparison. He should have died there, in the forefront of a ghastly triumph, away from the loss of harmony that later tortured his reason, away from the last mad charges at Waterloo, the outcome of a failure that yet does nothing to diminish the glory he shared with no one on the Retreat from Moscow.

He was the last of the French survivors to pass from Russian soil, and on the 15th, having left his post to General Marchand, he travelled by sledge to Königsberg.

The story goes that a French general, Dumas, whose quarters were on the border-line of Germany, was sitting down to breakfast one morning (it was still December) when a figure appeared in the doorway. It was that of

a man, cloaked, but not so heavily as to hide a wasted outline, with his features, all but the eyes, hidden under grime and powder marking.

‘Don’t you know me?’ queried the apparition.

Dumas returned a negative, which brought forth the splendid and virtually truthful boast:

‘I am the rear-guard of the Grand Army—Marshal Ney!’

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## CHAPTER IX

### THE EMPIRE IN ECLIPSE

WITH the disaster of 1812 the Revolution may be said to have ended. All that remained, and which is the history of the next three years, was to determine the place and manner of its visible and material passing. For vast movements, whose effects are permanent in the world, die in spirit and fail in tradition some time before their human executive ceases to function.

Any view of the Russian campaign as, first and foremost, a proof that Napoleon's power was on the ebb, and his vision waning, reverses the true significance of men and events. For his failure resulted from the advance and elemental decision that the Revolutionary effort, from which it sprang, had now been accomplished.

The very speech of the French showed their consciousness of great days being over. They felt twilight, a growing obscurity, and longed for the things of morning that were dead and could not be resurrected. As the shades closed in they remembered the past splendour of the old army, ragged, unfed, but with spirit that mounted to the stars, long before the Marshalate and still longer before its mutual antipathies, when sleep and defeat were unknown to the blazon of the Three Colours. 'Give me the men of Castiglione!' cried Augereau, while Napoleon faced climax with the call: 'We must pull on the boots of 1793.' But there was no one to answer.

The balancing of fate by human free will is a paradox of our Western condition. But if one thing can be stated as dogma of those who gave reality to invincible legend it is that the sense of gathering gloom, of impending tragedy, was always before them. A modern might well have said that the French soldiers were



psychic, for invariably, as death or failure neared, they felt it, however gay their exterior. Light laughs and a promise of victory died on the lips, and man became mortal, suddenly tired, in a way that recalls the burden of Shakespearean tragedy.

The Napoleon of 1805, having won some almost flawless triumphs, could yet speak of six years as marking the limit of his venture. He was right in the estimate, and was not deluded by a transitory gleam in the last German campaign. 'My Eagles were victorious, but my star is setting.' While a similar gloom was reflected by General Maison, also in Saxony: 'This is the last day for France. We shall all have closed our eyes by twilight.'

Bessières knew that his fate was upon him on the May Day of 1813, when the guns opened at Lützen. Lannes rode into action at Aspern-Essling, on the Whit Tuesday of 1809, with the taste of death in his mouth. 'Don't be slow in following,' he told his doctor, 'I shall probably need you to-day.' He did, and the French infantry were never led again with the same devilish valour. Desaix prophesied his own death at Marengo, as did Duroc at Bautzen. Young Colbert, most handsome and dashing of hussars, felt that he was destined to die early in Spain. Lasalle, who belonged to the same order of youth, expressed a boding before Wagram: 'This will be my last battle.' And sure enough, his brilliant light cavalry rode from the field without him.

This spirit of fatalism had passed into a national feeling by the spring of 1813, and Ney returned to a France that was just as resigned to defeat as, twenty years earlier, with Valmy marking the decision, it had been sure of victory. Consider the material that went to the making of the new armies, 300,000 strong, but a good half of these being boys under twenty. They had grown up in the aftermath of the red years, so that their courage, buoyed by the veteran tradition of Jena and Austerlitz, was more certain than their powers of endurance.

The Parisians, with their cruelly happy flair for a nickname, christened them 'Marie-Louises', laughed at their amateur discipline, fed them, and wept to see them march off, still learning to load or to keep saddles while on the way. But, although they could bungle such things as a military execution, these young 'Marie-Louises' held the gate of France not without honour, and died in ranks impeded by the arms they could scarcely handle. It was a marvel how the Revolution survived in them sufficiently to prolong the resistance, with the Tsar and Prussia still unbeaten, Austria and Sweden waiting for the moment to move, and English gold for ever in the background.

Ney's corps, comprising some 37,000 of these recruits with a thin stiffening of veterans, was still known as the 3rd, and formed part of the general concentration in Germany. The line occupied extended through a chain of fortresses in the south, with Ney's head-quarters at Erfurt, where he arrived on April 25th. There, in view of the fact that he held a position nearest the enemy, he was reinforced till his numbers stood at 50,000; a not insignificant vanguard, but one, like the rest of the French Corps, wholly deficient in cavalry (for the Empire was drained of horses and man-power alike) while, reviewing his ranks, he might have parodied Augereau's cry: 'Give me the men of Eylau, Elchingen, and Friedland!'

But the difference was not limited to rank and file, or to the regimental officers. For after Moscow it was apparent that Marshal Ney was no longer the same man. His brilliance, at the cost of performing the rear-guard epic, was one with the snow that covered the verve and splendour of the Grand Army. Henceforth he was tired, with the tired man's lack of control and indecision overcoming the characteristics of early days.

The plan of operations, embodying a dash through Saxony and on to Berlin, then followed by a decisive blow at Russia, was quite on the old scale. And on

April 29th Ney began his march in the direction of Leipzig, their first objective. It was blind going, with the river Elster and a range of hills screening the main enemy, while the advance, during the course of the next two days, was held up at Weissenfels and Rippach.

The young conscripts, under fire for the first time, drew into square. They emerged with the feeling of veterans, having stood up to repeated cavalry charges and heavy sabring. Ney was satisfied. His 3rd Corps was justifying its title, and the Russian screen gave to the eastward.

It was near Rippach, on May 1st, that the Marshal drew rein for a moment beside the body of Bessières, dead from a cannon-shot. He gave his verdict: 'It is our destiny, it is a fine death,' and continued slowly.

His task was to occupy a number of villages on the southern border of Lützen plain, and so protect the general assault from exposure by way of the river. By ten o'clock he had made his dispositions and was nearing Leipzig, where the French had already overcome a partial resistance. He rode with the Emperor's staff by the side of moving columns, who cheered the easy work of the morning—their first cheers, for the most part, on any field. As it was they were premature. A growing thunder from the south-west told that the French flank, where Ney had posted his men about the villages, was in danger; and orders reached him to ride back and hold them, especially the central position, at all costs.

He went like a fury, over the bridge and up an incline into Kaya, to find that two of the posts had been captured while another was on the point of falling. His 'Marie-Louises', with cavalry and bayonet charges succeeding one another, had found that courage and a sudden inspiration of confidence were not enough. Two fights, however successful, did not make a veteran, though they could yet respond to the coolness and example of a tried soldier.

Such a being was Ney on the ridge of Kaya when he drew his sword, calling upon the broken, bewildered boys to follow. And notwithstanding their pale cheeks and a new enemy advance they did so, pressing on with the bayonet to the far side of the villages which had been captured, while the guns bounced up in support. Ney was preparing his wave of attack for a further drive to the outer position when the Prussians countered, and once more the villages changed hands.

Now it was that the French line yielded at its vital centre, and swept by an accurate artillery fire the young columns broke over the plain. Ney's voice and gesture still followed them in the hope of effecting a rally, for he had sighted the Guard, hastening up through the near distance, to throw the invincible array of cloak and bearskin into the struggle. If only his corps could hold!

Here was Napoleon, riding through the guns and shouting, above the noise of panic: 'Young men, I counted on you to save the Empire. Are you going to desert me?' By degrees the rout comes to a standstill, and every halting group is re-formed hastily by the Marshal. Facing about he leads them in another attack, which fails, only to be repeated, till the villages have passed five times from one to the other.

It was then evening, and in the path of the red-gold sun watering the slope came a spectacle that consummated the Revolutionary triumph on many fields—the Imperial Guard, packed, grim, and silent, sweeping down like a hurricane. They joined bayonets with Ney's battalions, and before twilight the disputed centre was being held by the French, while the Allies retreated to Bautzen.

When speaking of the many attacks he had launched Ney paid an exalted tribute to his 'Marie-Louises', who had come through their first real test with flying colours: 'I doubt if I could have done the same thing with the old grenadiers of the Guard. The docility and perhaps

inexperience of those brave boys served me better than the trained courage of veterans. The French infantry can never be too young.'

So much for steel and musket; but a few thousand more horses might have enabled them to cut off the enemy from their present strong position, on the high ground to the east of Dresden. And while Napoleon followed this line of march Ney proceeded to Torgau on the Elbe, as a possible threat to Berlin while yet keeping in touch with the concentration.

But beyond this move was another design which, if properly executed, would have brought the Allies face to face with disaster. For while the Grand Army advanced straight on Bautzen, Ney was to execute a mock drive towards Berlin, then fall from the north-west on the right flank of the enemy, gain their rear, and so bar them from the one road of retreat. His 3rd Corps, strengthened by the addition of the 5th, was well on the march by May 17th, while three days later Napoleon struck in front of the massed armies.

This action, preparatory to the grand move, lasted till sundown. Ney's part was a minor one. He attacked the Russians at Klix, gained the village, and planted foot on the far side of the river, from whence he could turn the Allied right and cut off their retirement next day. And at this point a general outline of the plans might well be repeated, for apart from their intended influence on the war their failure set in relief a certain change which, from now onward, characterized the conduct and command of the Grand Army.

With Oudinot and Macdonald advancing on the left, and Soult in the centre, Ney was to carry his line as far as Preistitz by eleven o'clock. This would bring him well to the right-rear of the enemy, after which a further move on Hochkirch (marked by its church tower rising above the hilly background), would lead to the almost total extinction of the Tsarist and Prussian armies. But while Ney, in the observance and carrying out of orders,

had ceased to be the sure captain of early years, the same process was obvious in Napoleon.

Just before Bautzen, when all depended on Ney's movement, he pencilled a rough dispatch to the Marshal which had not the exactness of term demanded by his task and situation. It is most unlikely that Ney, at the summit of his career, would have failed to interpret the necessary conciseness from the general; but then, at the same time, Napoleon's plan would not have *admitted* a second reading. The something fatal was their combination of change and imminent lethargy, a middle-age whose premature reflection was deep on the Empire.

Ney was mounted before dawn, riding with one foot in a silk stocking and slipper, as he had taken a slight wound at Klix. Clear ahead, unveiled by the sunrise, was a model landscape, its green upturning the red and white of villages to a spring radiance. There were his objectives, Preistitz and Hochkirch tower; 60,000 infantry stood ready for attack, and soon after eight they were in motion. A sharp fight left them in possession of the first village, but elsewhere the advance was less decisive, and heavy reserves, including the Prussian Guard, were swung over to check Ney's divisions.

They did more, counter-attacking with such fury south of Preistitz that the French were forced to evacuate. So things remained until it was well past noon, when, aided by pressure from the centre and opposite flank, Ney recovered the vital ground from which he had but to continue in the direction of Hochkirch (and there was its church, squarely dominating the country), to render the campaign a definite victory for the Empire.

But, as already explained, neither the Marshal nor the orders he had received were still part of the great tradition dating from Valmy. And instead of the looked-for result in the enemy's rear he effected a move against Blücher holding the centre. It was enough to seal the battle as Napoleon's, while the Allies, driven from Saxony, were glad to sign an armistice on June 4th.

Such an ending, however, judging from the French side, was out of all proportion to the original promise of the operations.

They had nothing to show in actual captures for the victory, and a respite was essential for the young levies, who were far from being the hard, tireless marchers of 1805. In fact they went on training during the truce, which ended on August 10th. Some hours later the frontier summits of Bohemia and Silesia were red with bonfires, proclaiming the reappearance of Austria among the Allies; while Sweden, under ex-Marshal Bernadotte (now Crown Prince elect of that country), soon followed.

Ney, who at one time had sufficiently lost spirit to think of resigning, was in position at Liegnitz, facing Blucher. From there he was summoned to join Napoleon and his Guard for the relief of St. Cyr who was holding Dresden, a vital point as being direct in the line of communication with Paris.

Marching a distance of forty miles in just over forty-eight hours, on scanty rations and meeting urgent messages on the road, the Emperor with Ney and the Guard were outside the city by the early hours of August 26th. St. Cyr was a genius in defence, but his small and inexperienced garrison barely protected the southern outskirts; while the French all told made an army of 120,000, compared to an approximate 200,000 Allies who attacked in the afternoon of the same day.

They were driven off, and on the 27th Napoleon countered. Ney's post was in the centre, facing the high ground south of the city, which gave such natural advantage to the defenders that the main advance, by Victor's corps and Murat's cavalry, took place on the Allied left, while the opposite flank was assailed by Mortier. These moves were entirely successful, but the victory would have become more definite had the French been able to pursue. This time the drawback was Napoleon, who during the next few hours was ill with colic and vomiting, so that orders came to a standstill.

But, I repeat, no other course was humanly possible. It was the far side of 1812, the Revolutionary flood had turned back from its highest level, and no opportunity, however pregnant, could have been carried to the utmost. Dresden, in fact, was the last great motion of the Empire, though the nerves of that stricken body were yet to throb with a failing inspiration that had once been the chorused *Marseillaise*, the spirit of '96, and the passing wind of the ragged colours.

Meanwhile a Swedish threat was developing northward, and early in September an army under Ney, with Oudinot, Bertrand, and Reynier as corps commanders, was hurried to Wittemberg. He went with a bad grace, for the move was opposed to his better judgment, while Oudinot and Reynier had a marked preference for their own plans rather than the imposition of discipline. Ney, in short, was treated to the same measure of casualness that he had extended the Spanish command of Masséna. But it was one thing to be the offender and quite another to be the victim; and in a little over a week he was writing, full of complaints, to Berthier, asking to be removed from such a hell where he felt no more than 'half a commander', than which it was better to be an ordinary grenadier.

He had been through an experience painful enough to crack the heart of any old soldier. Reaching Wittemberg on September 4th, and fighting some distance beyond on the following day, he was confronted by two corps of Prussians. There was time to engage before the Swedes, coming down from the left, could support them, and on the 6th he attempted a stroke at Dennewitz.

The result was abject failure. Ney's plan was for Bertrand, Reynier, and Oudinot to drive home in rapid succession; but Reynier changed his route at the last minute, and Oudinot was so late in starting that the Swedes arrived on the field while the Prussians were still intact. Even then Ney, who was outnumbered for hours, had to summon Oudinot before his 12th Corps



effected any diversion; and this was immediately neutralized by the collapse of Reynier, who at last arrived on the left.

It must be stated, in fairness to this general, that his was a Saxon contingent whose loyalty was therefore open to question. But only the coming of darkness saved the northern army from being quite overwhelmed, and as it was, Ney retreated on Torgau having lost part of his artillery and 20,000 men. 'I have been badly beaten,' he wrote to Napoleon, 'and still do not know whether my army has reassembled.' His subordinates, not without justice, were held responsible; and before long Reynier's conduct so overstepped the bounds of discipline that Ney, failing the appointment of another corps commander, asked to be relieved and sent elsewhere. But Napoleon, rarely if ever concerned with the quarrels that shook his staff, could least be so in that grey autumn of the Empire.

Not that Ney's problem was limited to a lack of co-operation among his generals. For beyond that was the state of his troops, young and inexperienced when the campaign opened, but already treated to similar demands of action and exposure as the veterans of the original Grand Army. These demands, as it was only natural, encountered a different spirit and physique of resistance. The young men had little with which to oppose the bad health and weather conditions, the hunger resulting from faulty transport, and marching fatigue. They needed rests, which could not be allowed them; and in due time the signs of a shaken and demoralized spirit appeared in the lower ranks. Men lagged over duties; there were growing gaps in the marching columns, which had ceased to swing but moved with a wounded or resentful motion; while here and there a casualty presented himself with maimed hand or similar hurt which had not been inflicted by the enemy.

Such a state of things might well have reached Napoleon as minor or fragmentary considerations; but to the

divisional and army leaders they were a never-absent crisis. Head-quarters suggested plans for a sudden swoop on Berlin: Ney and his fellow Marshals opposed them. More than this the fiery Ney, looking over his troops, was forced to decline the chance of battle unless he could be supported. Imagine this in the early days, when the Revolution was still a fever and young Ney ready to ride against the bugles! Compare it with the spirit that grumbled only when a retreat was ordered, or bayonets kept idle in the sheath! Had it been possible to carry out a march on Berlin in the old style there might yet have been a bare soldier's chance of saving the Empire. But no such move could be attempted. The men of Valmy were silent, and the Sambre-et-Meuse already had passed into legend.

Meanwhile an Allied thrust, carried out by more than 300,000 Russians, Austrians, Prussians, and Swedes compelled the French to fall back from Dresden and rally at Leipzig. By then their total strength was 170,000, formed in a half-circle about the city with Ney, at the head of his old 3rd Corps, on the north-east.

The early shots on the morning of October 16th heralded a three-day battle, during which, for part of the time, Ney was ordered to march and counter-march, occupying a number of positions, but some without definite engagement. First he was sent to the high ground south of the city, and marched eight miles only to stand as reserve. A later move found him slightly advanced in the vicinity of Dosen. Then it was learnt that his original post, on the north-east, needed reinforcement, and clattering back through the narrow streets he fell in rearward of Marmont.

Darkness put an end to the first day's action. The half-circle was practically unimpaired; but the 3rd Corps had been wasted.

Sunday the 17th was dull and rain-locked, with bursts of wind playing over the squares of the Grand Army. There were skirmishes and firing among the outposts.

But whereas the French were tired the Allies were waiting—waiting to swell their already considerable numbers with more Russians, arriving from the north.

It was still raining at night when Napoleon called on Ney at his head-quarters (for the heaviest blow was expected to fall across the Partha, on the front of the 3rd Corps), and Emperor and Marshal sat for an hour over candle-lit maps. As a result Ney was given charge of the northern defences. The rain continued, with ragged clouds hiding the moon. It was a sleepless, anxious night for the Grand Army, while through it all fresh battalions were coming in to stiffen the Allied trap. And trap it was, for press of numbers made it almost impossible for the French, whose way would have to follow the twisted thoroughfares, to operate as a whole.

Morning on the 18th was bright and sun-washed. A cursory glance was sufficient to show Ney that the opposite line had extended, with peril to his left, which therefore necessitated the further stringing-out of his own front. He was outweighed both in man- and gun-power, but till noon, when the enemy attack developed, the effects of a long artillery duel were by no means unequal.

Then came a Russian drive across the Partha. His skirmishers broke, the left flank hung in the air and was rolled backward. Two horses went down under the Marshal, who otherwise was reeling in his saddle with pain from a shoulder wound. He retired, keeping his left in touch with Marmont, and gradually the northern posts fell to the Russians. The south still offered a bare resistance, but a few hours would have ended the struggle; and when darkness fell the Grand Army worked a cramped and confused way out of Leipzig, and began its march to the Rhine.

A few weeks in hospital sufficed for Ney, who was back in the field before the year ended. Meanwhile the

Allies, their routes marked by Langres, Belfort, and Basle, were pouring into France. Another in that interminable series of efforts, born of the Revolution, was needed to meet them, and decrees were issued calling upon a country that was near dryness.

Where were the men? France had suffered 45,000 casualties at Leipzig alone, where a shortage of ammunition had also occurred. But in one of the villages an old peasant was heard speaking: 'It's no longer a question of Bonaparte. Our soil is invaded. Let us go and fight.' Heads were erect again with something of the old Republican fervour; the *Marseillaise*, hitherto forbidden under the Empire, returned to the barrel-organs; starving boys, for the times were increasingly hungry, became soldiers at a moment's notice; colleges were emptied of cadets, who were immediately commissioned. Time enough, during the intervals of a route march, to finish training, with veteran sergeants or even a Marshal at need to act as instructor.

The combined remnants of Ney, Victor, and Marmont were occupying Nancy, where Napoleon joined them in the new year. Fresh commands came into existence, a division of the Young Guard, numbering 2,500, being placed under Ney. This was his total strength, a mere handful compared to the legions of early days. But the country, notwithstanding its new note of enthusiasm, had no more bone and muscle to fling into the furnace. Bluff was necessary, and it took the form of a general re-denomination, whereby weak brigades were known as divisions, and skeleton divisions as so many corps, for the benefit of Allied intelligence.

The danger to Paris was thus being countered by a system of pretence, too weak to stand the glare of reality, much less blows. But behind it was the man of Vendémiaire, the brain of Austerlitz, and by consummating a style of warfare that was too extensive to rank as guerrilla, yet too restricted in scale for a pitched battle, the mad star of Joséphine's days returned to a brief glory which

overshadowed the part performed by Ney in that sporadic resistance.

Beating up the valley of the Marne, he encountered the Prussian rear at Brienne on January 29th. With Napoleon checked for the time being and falling back upon Troyes the invaders split forces, hoping to execute a simultaneous march on Paris. Then came the first of the lightning strokes by the French, presaged at the end of February when they advanced on Laon.

It is well that information had been faulty, for the Allied total in that district was little short of 100,000. Ney was back in his old post as vanguard leader, his force, under the present system, comprising two divisions and an extra brigade; but its actual strength was not more than 5,000.

His foremost position meant that Ney took a prominent part in the fighting that opened at Caronne on March 5th. For two days the enemy rear held out stubbornly, but in the end Caronne was cleared and Ney swept on to force a way through the marshy levels of Ardon.

Beyond Étouvelles was a crossing that led to the hamlet of Chivy, both places being occupied by the Russians. The weather turned colder on the 8th, and it was in a frosty fog-bound atmosphere that the vanguard, led by Ney in person, broke bivouacs at midnight, forming and marching silently to attack. The darkness was further clouded by a sudden snowstorm, through which the first bayonet shock broke on the Russian sentries. A rout, spreading from them to the main body, opened Chivy to the French, who dashed on and finally rallied beyond the village. Snow and fog continued, much to the benefit of the attackers, since occasional glimpses, caught through the half-light, still kept the enemy doubtful as to the numbers opposing them.

From that point the victorious vanguard swept on to Semilly, the last centre of resistance in the advance on Laon, which was garrisoned by Prussians under Blücher. That old general was frankly puzzled, his military wisdom

differing from sense of touch, which conveyed a more or less true impression as to the actual weakness of Ney's command.

On the 10th he launched an attack, which Ney countered and soon followed up by an attempt to gain the ramparts. This also failed; the Prussians stood grimly defensive; and at last, with the odds increasing to four to one against them, the French retired. Ney's handful had borne the brunt of the recent fighting and now it was called upon to act as rear-guard, holding its ground till the last moment and giving battle, at great cost, for two incredible days while the main body reorganized. So far as it was possible to his nature the Marshal expressed some feeling of the wearied responsibility that was demanded by such tasks in a letter to Berthier; then, at the head of a few surviving companies, he staggered into Soissons.

There was a further distribution of units, and Ney emerged with a skeleton force of 2,500. He stood by in a reserve capacity when Napoleon, with a startling manifestation of his old genius, defeated the Allies at Rheims. On March 15th Ney scored an independent success by clearing Châlons, which had been a supply centre for the Prussians. From there a convoy, as part of Ney's capture, was soon on its way to Rheims, a scene and exploit that were quite in the manner of those early days when the young hussar was marking his rise with chevrons.

Neither was the manifestation of French arms any less fantastic in the present campaign, with weak, scattered, and worn-out elements holding at bay, or even paralysing, the massed forces of monarchical Europe. This mood was further reflected in Ney's call for reinforcements, his intention being to operate with a free hand apart from the main body. As a result his numbers were made up to 5,000, but a general advance to the Aube, which swung him into line again as the left column, cut short his independent prospects.

He marched from Châlons on the 18th, and two days

later crossed to the south bank of the river, where he held a line from Arcis to the village of Torcy. There he was visited by Napoleon, and during the course of inspection an officer was sent forward to reconnoitre. He was a young man of the partially trained cadet type, and somehow failed to observe the approach of a strong Allied army under Schwartzenberg. So it happened that the conversation of Emperor and Marshal was interrupted by a sudden attack. Napoleon galloped off to take charge at Arcis, leaving Ney in command of the village with instructions not to yield a foot of ground to the enemy whose numbers, during the fighting, were brought up to 20,000.

The encounter that followed almost approaches the parallel achieved by the rear-guard actions of 1812. First the French were driven out of the village; Ney, putting himself at the head of bayonets, retrieved it; posts on the southern end were overwhelmed, twice in succession; and each time the French hold was re-established; a ceaseless bombardment by heavy guns set fire to the houses, and, thus lighted, the terrible weight of the Russian Guard was thrown upon the thin, straining remnant that stood for the honour of the Grand Army.

Evening, firelit and resounding, closed down on the struggle, with the Allied ranks drawing apart to make way for a cavalry onset. Sabre flashing, in and out of the twilight, was added to the work of musket and artillery. But Torcy, and Napoleon's order, remained inviolate. The Allies drew back under darkness, leaving Ney with more than a thousand casualties and his brilliant defensive record with a new lustre.

Meanwhile, the French observation work remained imperfect, and Ney was ordered to attack the high ground outside Torcy where reinforcements had made the Allied total 100,000, with 370 guns. This move was actually in progress when a further survey showed up the error, and after an exchange of gunfire, with minor cavalry

brushes, Ney fell back to the Aube, crossed it, and wrecked the bridges behind him.

Continuing their retirement the French moved over the Marne, near Vitry, which had fallen to the Allies. It was difficult going, for a spell of rainy weather had made the roads almost impassable to cannon—(a hundred years later, with Foch and his *poilus* manning them, these same ways were rendered impassable in another sense).

Ney was once more acting as vanguard, and daylight on the 22nd found him on the outskirts of Vitry, his companies formed for attack and his guns already pounding the garrison. But not a man or a moment could be spared for sieges, and Ney was ordered to join the concentration at St. Dizier, arriving there on the 23rd.

Cavalry patrols pushed forward, south and west, groping for the enemy whose moves, from the time that the French crossed over the Marne, were hidden. The only gleam of intelligence concerned the approach of mounted troops from the north-west; but efforts to identify such a move complicated the French staff still more deeply. Was this a solitary detachment, or the head of an army? Should they go back across the Marne or hold their present positions? According to latest report the approaching troops were Austrians; if so, where was Blücher, where were the Russians?

For the Grand Army, what with its own weakness, the odds against it, and faulty knowledge, was confused and blinded by the maze of events in the battlefields of eastern France. Endless maps and the service of a geographer failed to achieve any correspondence between the reported whereabouts and apparent operations of the enemy; the fact being that Blücher, with sudden inspiration, had found the secret of Napoleon's resistance. Numbers were shown as existing only on paper, barriers to be tossed aside in the course of a day's marching. Thus enlightened he gave the order: "To Paris!" and so commenced the series of moves, with part of the Allies keeping in touch with the French while other



corps prepared to invest the capital, which had worked havoc with Napoleon.

There was fighting at St. Dizier, where Ney took a secondary role, on the 26th, followed by an enemy withdrawal in the direction of Vitry. They could well afford to make a show of retiring, as a few days would bring them news of the thrust delivered at Paris. Meanwhile a true understanding of the situation had dawned on Napoleon, who turned about in a desperate endeavour to outpace the fatal march of the Allies.

Order was sacrificed to speed, and the Grand Army, moving in straggling columns, reached Troyes on the 30th. Marmont and Mortier had charge of the garrison in the capital. What would be their measure of resistance? For three months the joints of the Empire had held together, as though by a miracle. Now to crown that brilliant feat by giving battle outside the city, which stood for Napoleon. Paris was loyal. Paris remembered Brumaire, Italy, and '96. Paris remembered the Marshals. . . .

It was an hour before twilight. A ball of sun, seen through mists, watered the slope of Montmartre. Prussian batteries were there in position, manned and ready, but without firing. For Marmont had surrendered.

Napoleon raged at the news, but still he spoke of concentrating at Fontainebleau and sweeping on to recover Paris. No one shared his illusion. The mad star had crashed from its zenith. A Provisional Government was formed already, with plans for securing the Corsican's abdication and recalling the Bourbons. Rally at Fontainebleau? The new order rested on foreign bayonets, 150,000 ready to strike, with masses approaching the city. Napoleon might exert his old influence over the Guard who, faithful as ever, gave him their voices: 'Vive l'Empereur! A Paris! A Paris!' The magic of Marengo was still potent. But the Marshals had ceased to move in the light of fantasy.

Ney, as one of a group gathered on the terrace at Fontainebleau, recalled the details of his own 'army'. Actual numbers, 2,270; morale, broken; condition, worn out and ragged. This was typical of the other commands, with half Europe swelling the march on Paris. No review, no glamour of the Bearskins, could compensate for such a division, and it rested with Ney, who was too blunt for mockery, too tired for further striving, to sum up their chances in a sentence: 'Only an abdication can get us out of this.'

(He spoke within the shadow of Fontainebleau where, over twenty years earlier, the same thought must have occurred to others on the eve of the Revolution.)

So much was realized by those about him. Napoleon would have to be told after the ceremony, and casting round for a deputation the Marshals fixed on two of their number whose bravery was less in question than their talent: Moncey and ex-Sergeant-Major Lefèbvre. But neither of these could be counted on to cross terms with the Emperor, and Ney, who for all his bluntness was not lacking in diplomatic experience, offered to act as spokesman. There was some hazard in such an office, for although it was learnt that the Senate had voiced a demand for abdication, the military leaders, in seconding that view, might still have incurred the penalty of a court martial.

The last files left the parade-ground; the circle of staff officers broke up; and the cooper's son headed the mission to Napoleon's study. They entered without observing the usual etiquette, and three pairs of eyes, meeting the mute question that was put by their leader, dropped awkwardly. Ney broke the silence by asking, superfluously enough, if news had arrived from Paris. Napoleon's trifling reply (a negative when he knew, as well as the Marshals, that his abdication had been called for), was equally superfluous. Ney responded by declaring their knowledge of the situation, but Napoleon put aside this gesture of reality by referring to the people's will, beyond that of the Senate.

Then, with his mind reverting to the Allies, he spoke the words that showed his soldier's sense of an endless battle horizon, unclouded by difficulty or defeat: 'I shall crush them under the walls of Paris.'

How continue the resistance, Ney argued? Where were the men, what possibility of succeeding? But facts had ceased to have their way with the Emperor, who outlined a military schedule as though he were once more ruling a continent from the camp table, with spur and feather at hand to picture his inspiration.

'It is a pity that peace was not made sooner,' Ney calmly reminded him. But the vision that had soared at Austerlitz was filled with the fantasy of new armies—of a whole people—rising to cut the path of the invader.

'Sire, it is time to stop,' came the interruption. 'You are in the position of a man on his death-bed. You must make a will and abdicate in favour of your son.'

Just then Oudinot and Macdonald, who had freshly arrived with their corps, entered the apartment, and Napoleon repeated his plans for another struggle. But they too knew the general feeling (Macdonald had heard a cry from one of his battalions: 'Damn it, let us have peace!'), and both sided with Ney. The Emperor persisted—they must strike at the Allies in the capital.

'But the army will not march on Paris,' Ney told him.

'The army will obey me,' replied Napoleon.

'Sire, the army will obey its generals,' corrected the man of Saarlouis.

A silence. They were all soldiers present, and realized the actual finality of Ney's assertion. Drastic choice would reveal Napoleon to the troops as only the figure-head whose service was implied by his uniform; whereas the generals had more intimate and personal claim upon their obedience. The musket straightened in salute to the throne or was broken, if need be, defending it; even so was the baton; and common hire was a link between the bearers.

Having requested an interview with Caulaincourt,

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Napoleon signed a *conditional* abdication in favour of his son, the King of Rome. Such a step, in order to give it the appearance of military sanction, was to be declared to the Allies by Caulaincourt and three of the Marshals, Ney and Macdonald, already on the spot, and Marmont, whose corps lay at Essonnes. For a stable front on the part of the army was necessary, as a means of impressing the Allied sovereigns, if the conditional nature of the abdication was to become valid and Napoleon's son succeed him.

With this in mind Caulaincourt, accompanied by Ney and Macdonald, arrived at Essonnes late that afternoon. Marmont was plainly embarrassed, and eventually told the commissioners of an arrangement, based on the assumption of all being over, that he had made with the Allies. In effect, he was to march his corps over to the enemy lines, a capitulation that was less significant from the material than the moral standpoint. It was a rift in the show of unity that was essential for Napoleon's stipulation, as to his son's following, to carry weight with the Allies. Any hint by Caulaincourt and the Marshals of a still possible resistance would stand revealed as a hollow threat, incapable of execution, since part of the army had now defected.

Marmont excused himself by reverting to a previous saying of Napoleon's: 'If the enemy invaded France and seized the heights of Montmartre, you would naturally believe that the safety of your country would command you to leave me, and if you did so you would be a good Frenchman, a brave man, a conscientious man, but not a man of honour.'

Loyalty was put to strange and unusual tests in those days. But some preserved their courage and independence, some few whose equal proneness to the downward tendency of flesh and blood, as invariably happens, was overlooked by the subjects of easy failure. Let it be fast in mind that bending under, or enduring the strain, are manifestations of the one human capacity. 'Et nous?'

as Rostand, speaking for the Great Unconquered, asks those who surrender.

Marmont's act had cut the ground from under the commissioners' feet; but something might still be saved, and at six o'clock they took coach for the Rue St. Florentin where Talleyrand, now President of the Senate, was entertaining the Tsar.

It had gone nine before they were admitted to Alexander who seemed, on the face of things, to support their mission. Ney emphasized the chances of civil war if Napoleon's condition should be refused, and the Bourbons returned to the country. Then, not dissatisfied at the promise of events, he left with Marmont for his own house, having arranged to continue the talk next morning.

Meanwhile things had taken a decisive turn at Marmont's camp, during his absence. His second-in-command, General Souham, alarmed at the thought of their negotiations becoming public, had, on his own responsibility, marshalled the corps and led it to the Allied position.

Ney was breakfasting with his wife and Marmont when the latter explained how news of this had reached him during the night. 'I would give my right arm to have prevented it,' he told them.

'Your arm! Your head would not be enough,' was Ney's rejoinder.

It was plain that every hope of coming to terms with the Allies was now ended, and at nine o'clock, when the commissioners renewed their visit, the King of Prussia announced this finding of the diplomatic council: 'Events no longer permit the Powers to treat with the Emperor Napoleon. The wishes of France for the return of the ancient sovereigns are manifest on all sides.'

It was not in Ney to nurse an illusion, or trifle with reality. His mind was cast for essential, single issues, a straight road and a definite horizon. Such men are baffled by alternatives, by confessing a principle that

may, if occasion demands, admit division. He saw now that the Empire, and beyond that the Revolution, were ended; a spirit had gone, with the best of his own manhood; the marching ways were white and bare over all that was human of the Grand Army.

So it was that before returning to Fontainebleau he again called on Talleyrand, making his peace with the Provisional Government and the movers of restoration. It now remained for the commissioners to acquaint Napoleon with the Allies' decision, a task from which Ney excused himself on the ground that he had no courage except when facing an opponent. And reaching Fontainebleau between nine and ten they again crossed into the study, where Ney's contribution to the final blow was a short sentence: 'Sire, we have succeeded only in part.'

At the onset they found Napoleon as they had left him, a visionary in command. He had formed new plans; his troops would execute a swing with the Loire for a background—but this time the objections, as part of an inevitable fate that they had already encountered, were firmer. That way was impossible, this way was the spectre of civil war. There could be no returning; and at half-past eleven Ney put seal on a note to Talleyrand, informing him that the final surrender had been accomplished.

Ney was among those, next morning, who instructed the Chief-of-Staff that no order must reach the troops from Napoleon. Then they repaired to witness his signing the act of total renunciation. It was a haggard man who confronted them with a last call on behalf of the Eagles—another rally was surely possible, one fight the more. But the bugle note had gone out of his voice, and the Marshals were tired and silent. Their attitude could not be mistaken, whatever conflict the great soldier at bay wrought with his vision.

'You want rest,' he concluded. 'Well, you shall have it.'

A few rapid strokes of the pen, and the first epic of Napoleon was already rounded for history. The eyes of

Ney and the other commissioners encountered the document, a patch on a round-top table fronting a window that overlooked the garden of Diana, where spring flowers were blowing.

The Marshal was soon on his way to Paris. And now, released from the goal of his youthful spurring, a new life awaited him in the capital. He was forty-five; few of those years had been spent in his own country, and fewer still in domestic quarters. He would continue in the service of France, but a France at peace; as a soldier, but with honour gained in the background. For almost the first time in his life he was beating homeward, as man should, with a sense of going to shelter. Before him were Aglaé and the children, behind him the lines of sodden bivouacs with smoke growing fainter in the distance.

At Fontainebleau, on February 20th, Napoleon descended the Horseshoe Stairs to the grey-walled Court of the Adieu, where he said farewell to the Guard and their tattered banner. Some weeks later, on April 28th 1814, he boarded the ship of exile that took him to Elba.

Back in Paris, one morning, Ney was acting as host to the Tsar at a sumptuous breakfast. It was no secret that Alexander greatly respected Ney as a soldier, and managed to show it on this occasion by so many acts of deference that the Marshal had tears in his eyes while still at table.

At least, such is the general construction laid on the scene; but perhaps those tears marked the commencement of Ney's agony, of his greatest struggle.

The lives of men who chart a way through great events are more pathetic reading than poetry. For the last to be said in the majority of cases is that they lived too long, beyond the utmost of rightful endeavour and accomplishment.

Marshal Ney should have been left behind in the snows

of 1812, in one of those scattered yet immortal exploits that saved proud men for a lesser downfall. And I think he was lost from the moment when he shed tears whose origin was not part of sorrow, our common birthright, but that mingling of personal and problematical ties whose end is fatality.



CHAPTER X  
UNDER THE BOURBONS

'NOTHING is changed; there is merely one Frenchman the more.' This sentiment was expressed in the *Moniteur* concerning the arrival of Louis XVIII in Paris, from his English refuge. He had been met at Compiègne by Ney and Marmont, the reverse of a kingly figure in his Marshal's uniform and velvet boots (for he was fat and gouty), with three chins, a pair of gigantic epaulettes, and strings of orders dangling over his white mound of waistcoat.

Ney turned orator for the occasion and delivered a speech of welcome. Then, under an escort of foreign sabres, King Louis ambled into the Tuileries and deposited his slippers at the base of the throne of Clovis. There was nothing in such a scene to recall the stride and jingle of 'Long-boots'; but still, 'nothing is changed. . . .'

The veterans must have regarded this piece of journalism with bitter amusement. Nothing changed? What of the order by which all the conquests of the tricolour were given up—Belgium, Italy, the Rhineland, Nice, Savoy, and Geneva, a line of glory, as we remember, but now marked by ruined forts and surrendered garrisons? Of the fires lighted on the sacred ground of the Champs-Élysées, for the warming of barbarous limbs and the chanting of a Cossack chorus: 'Father Paris is to pay for Mother Moscow'? Of the many half-pay soldiers who were ordered out of the capital, 'sent to plant cabbages in their departments', as one of them put it? Of the Eagles, which had been taken away from the army? Of the coldness or deliberate insult extended to some of the Marshals by such as the Duke of Angoulême, who flaunted an English uniform as though to show his

support of feudalism and contempt for the post-Revolutionary dogma? Of the easy rate of promotion by which silk and satin Royalists passed straight from a drawing-room to the head of a regiment? Of the levelling of the Legion of Honour to a common and civilian status?

Nothing changed? The Emperor's statue in the Place Vendôme was covered with a white sheet, the same colour as the ribbons that were flung to the National Guard and the people, few of whom had troubled to pick them up and fewer still to wear them. Grizzled veterans who had come through the crimsoned snow-fields of 1812 were treated like young recruits in need of hardening, and took consolation for their twenty years' service by stowing the old cockade away in their knapsacks.

To the young generation, which had grown up under the Empire, the Bourbons were equivalent to a foreign power, especially as they stood by the weight of British and Prussian bayonets. There was a caricature of Louis riding behind a Cossack into France, over a way that was lined with French corpses. Not that the helpless old waddler had thought of harm, for left to himself the Royalist and Revolutionary pasts would have compromised. But such a course was contrary to the views of the exiles who were pouring back into France, intent on restoring the régime that was virtually ended by the forming of the States-General in 1789.

Their lack of wisdom, and the widespread resentment it called into being, was apparent even to the Allies; while Macdonald spoke for all those who, like himself, had trimmed their sails to the new wind only to be disappointed, when he described the Government as behaving 'like a sick man who is utterly indifferent to all about him'.

There was much talk in the cafés, talk of the general who fired a shot for the Empire by appearing at dinner, where he had been asked to meet Wellington, in riding coat, nankeen breeches, and dusty shoes, as a denial of

compliment to the man who was chaining France. And the Guard—what marching, in that last procession through Paris, with Louis in their midst instead of Napoleon! Onlookers were chilled into silence by the sad, almost hurried, aspect of those moving columns, warriors cast from some gigantic frieze that was not of the present, burdened with a glory of attack and defence whose like was never again on any field, while here and there, above the chin-straps of the heavy marchers, teeth bared in a snarl as the form of Louis showed through the bayonets.

Elsewhere, in social circles, the ordinaries of life were again being marked by empty ritual. The length of lappets and the size of a mantilla became objects of criticism, while the etiquette of precedence was re-established. (One great law as to precedence had sprung from the Revolution—that a Marshal rode forty paces in front of his marching battalions, and God knows how many paces ahead when the guns opened.)

But there was a regular occasion when Bourbon supporters, even women who had worn eighteen tucks in their skirts from loyalty to Louis XVIII during his exile, were made to doubt the patriotism of the restoration; and that when the challenge and answer of the sentinels guarding Paris were heard in their various foreign accents. At such moments every listener belonged to the France of the Grand Army, and not of the White Cockade with its trail of English, Cossack, and Prussian.

The part of Ney in securing Napoleon's abdication had promised well for his standing with the Bourbons. His rank as Marshal with the addition of an older title, Lieutenant-General of the King, was ratified, together with his military honours as Duke of Elchingen and Prince of the Moscowa. He commanded the Royal Grenadiers or, as some still chose to remember that corps elect, the Imperial Guard. He was invested with the Grand Cross of the Order of St. Louis. A Peer of France, he was entitled to sit in the Upper House of

the Legislature under the new system. But all such privileges were rendered hollow by the attitude of the old nobility, the men of feudal or medieval token who affected to overlook those families whose starting-point had been the Revolution.

'Let me see, you are Madame Junot, are you not?' asked the Duchess of Angoulême of the recently created Duchess of Abrantés; while the same school of uncertainty found that Madame Ney occurred more easily to mind than her title, Princess of the Moscowa. She was even addressed as Aglaé by the returned Royalists, and at such times she worried her husband with tales of insulting treatment at the palace.

For his own part, Ney would have been untroubled by the petty reminders that struck his wife as so much loss of prestige. The strong oak grounded in fields like Elchingen and Jena could well be unmindful of the coloured tits pecking at its branches. But Aglaé, with the typical regard of her kind for pleasure and plumage, so stirred him that at last he complained to Louis.

His interview with the Court Chamberlain, however, who reflected the prevailing manner of the Tuileries' circle, filled him with no small part of Aglaé's resentment. 'These people know nothing. They cannot know what the name of Ney stands for. Shall I have to teach them?'

The news of such happenings was made known to the exile at Elba. 'Do my generals go to Court?' asked Napoleon. 'Yes, sire,' he was told, 'and they are all enraged to find themselves superseded in favour by emigrants who have never heard the sound of a cannon.'

With life in Paris thus made unbearable, Ney retired to his country house at Coudreaux in the October of 1814. And now, it seemed, his hopes for a quiet existence were about to be realized. He could count himself well rid of society, whose insolence and dissipation had jarred upon his own simple manners in much the same way as those manners had been opposed to the splendid affectation of that society. News of the capital reached him,

but with an ever-fading significance as the early weeks of 1815 passed over Coudreaux.

Now and again it was an echo from the world of politics, where moves were afoot to overthrow the Bourbon Government and establish a Regency in the name of Napoleon II. But Ney, who had seen enough of action, was not to be tempted. Any move for a French conspiracy would be followed by a new outbreak of war, with nothing in the scale of possibility to counteract such a disaster. Beside, the noisy mood of the Revolution had passed out of being. Men who had stood to live or die by its opportune epics could now, in the fullness of middle age, afford the remaining time for tranquillity.

In the hour of Napoleon's weakness a friend advised him: 'We will live upon the past. There is enough of that to satisfy us.' So much comfort, so much regret—a not unlikely mingling for any future.

Early in March, however, he received a communication from Soult, now Minister of War, announcing his appointment to Besançon as commander of the 6th Division. There was a campaign note in the brief urgency of such an order, and Ney, leaving that very night, put in to Paris on the afternoon of the 7th.

Almost at once, before receiving details of service, he was interviewed by his notary who burst upon him with the words: 'This is very extraordinary news.' Ney, fresh from the business of travel, asked his meaning; and there learnt the startling events of February 26th and March 1st, as they were being made known in the *Moniteur*.

On the former date Napoleon and his 'sacred battalion' of followers, boarding the brig *Inconstant* and a convoy of merchant vessels, had left Elba; on the latter, after a voyage favoured by light winds, they had come ashore near Cannes, under the olives. And from Var to Marseilles the country-side had been roused by semaphores announcing the return of 'Long Boots'.

Ney was completely taken aback, and poured out

questions: 'What a misfortune! What a terrible business it is! What can be done? Who is there to oppose that man?' A similar consternation was reflected at Vienna, where the diplomats of monarchical Europe had met to quarrel over the spoils of the Empire. The Congress accordingly left off dancing and returned to its maps, in a way that justified Chateaubriand's pithy saying: 'If the cocked hat and surtout of Napoleon were placed on a stick on the shores of Brest, it would cause Europe to run to arms from one end to the other.'

Great Britain, Russia, Austria, Prussia, Sweden, Spain, and Portugal, without allowing for any alternative on the part of the French people, pledged themselves to renew hostilities; while back in Paris Marshal Ney donned his uniform and pledged himself to the Royalists.

His manner of doing so was strangely theatrical and excited. For from now on, till he placed himself ahead of the last remnant of the Imperial columns, and the armed factors of the cause by which he had risen were streaming away under a Belgian moonlight, he was bereft of balance, lost in a conflict of word and action that meant the death of his natural bearing. Hitherto blunt, he now expressed himself to the point of extravagance; and from being the proverbial plain soldier whose duty was a conscious divide from demonstration, he lived for a while in keeping with that parody of the Gallic which has been imposed on secondary minds as the French nature.

Calling on Soult at the Ministry of War, he referred to the landing: 'It is a piece of madness. What do you want me to do?' and when informed that final instructions would be given him later by General de Bourmont, the Marshal announced his intention of first seeing Louis. Soult replied that the King was unwell, but declaring: 'You will not prevent me from seeing His Majesty,' Ney drove to the palace.

It was further evidence of the turmoil and uncertainty under which he laboured. He was determined by the knowledge of his own weakness. Had he been firm he

would have taken up his commission, as in the old days, without the need of clapping a spur or waving a feather beforehand. But now he must strike a gesture and pour out words, for by such passes does the mind, once unsteady, seek to recover its lost assurance.

Late that evening he secured admission to the Tuileries, where he kissed the King's hand and spoke of how he would put down the rising. Louis hoped that it might be done without bloodshed, but Ney was not prepared to paint the occasion in neutral colours. As for the Corsican, he disposed of him to Louis in a threat that lives as the summary of a brave man's hysteria: 'Sire, I hope I shall soon be in a position to bring him back in an iron cage.' With that he swaggered off to front the invasion while Louis, taken aback by the vehemence of irresponsibility, was heard to mutter: 'I did not ask all that of him.'

It was March 10th when Ney arrived at Besançon, where he found a garrison of 500 whose loyalty to the throne was at least doubtful. The safest course, their officers told him, was to keep them in barracks, otherwise they might be infected by the 'Vive l'Empereur!' which was being heard even in those Royalist provinces of the south. He was appointed second-in-command of this assembly—a not imposing office for one who had led the old moustaches through the gates of Europe; and he was soon writing to the Comte d'Artois, who was Lieutenant-General of the Kingdom, requesting service in the van of the Royal Army.

Meanwhile the Napoleonic fever was sweeping the country-side, and with Lyons threatened by 10,000 of his followers the Bourbon troops fell back in the direction of Paris. A messenger in post-chaise carried the news to Besançon, but instead of joining the retirement Ney decided to effect a rally at Lons-le-Saulnier, on the road to Lyons, where the tricolour had since been hoisted.

He could reckon, perhaps, on 6,000 men coming in from the eastern departments, while every hour was

bringing new strength to the already superior forces of Napoleon. But the irresponsible outbursts still persisted. 'I shall settle accounts with Bonaparte,' he told his lieutenants, 'we are going to attack the wild beast.' This was on Friday, March 10th, and next day he started for Lons-le-Saulnier.

Every mile of that drive was pregnant with the turmoil of his strange, heated spirit. At Poligny, where horses were changed, he repeated his intention of caging Napoleon, to which the local prefect remarked that it might be better to bring him back dead in a tumbril. 'No, no,' informed Ney, 'you don't understand Paris. The Parisians must see him.' And afterwards: 'It is a good thing that the man of Elba has attempted this rash enterprise, for it will be the last act of his tragedy, the *dénouement* of the Napoleon epic.' So, still protesting too much, the Marshal arrived at Lons-le-Saulnier soon after midnight.

He put up at the Hotel of the Golden Apple, where a traveller, recently come from Lyons, told him of Napoleon's entry and his greeting by the garrison and the people. The traveller had one of his proclamations, which he handed to Ney, who stuffed it into his pocket without reading. Napoleon, he learnt, was giving it out that Austria had promised to support him, a suggestion which Ney derided so heartily that the civilian took new confidence. 'Ah,' he exclaimed, 'you have already been the saviour of France in forcing Napoleon to abdicate. You will save us a second time.'

By reason of the superficial mood which had come upon him, Monsieur le Maréchal, in spite of his years of battle and brave experience, was pleasantly flattered by the words. The saviour of France! Moscow had not earned him such a tribute. Next day, with the gusto of a promoted *bleu*, he repeated it to his staff. And then: 'You will save us a second time.' Surely the greater days were beginning!



One by one the guests of the Golden Apple retired to bed. Candles flickered or died out behind the curtains. But downstairs the fire still smouldered, and before it a man in uniform was bent over a paper, reading. The ruddy reflection showed up features that were otherwise illuminated by magic, for the paper was Napoleon's proclamation which, as he read it in the silence of that dim apartment, was recalling the Marshal to duty.

There it was, the old well-known magic of words which had caused men to flout the impossible in a score of fields from Italy to the Pyramids: 'Soldiers, rally to the colours of your old leader. His rights are also yours, and those of the people. Victory will march with us at the charging step, and the Eagle with the national colours will fly from steeple to steeple to the towers of Notre-Dame.'

This was the essence of soldiering, every word sounding like a drum-tap even there, in a dusky inn room with a crumbling fire that, as the man gazed, broke and formed into cavernous fantasies. Over it all loomed a shadow in a grey coat with pale face and eyes that were cold as marble, while visioned forth from hollows of the fire came the hosts of his inspiration, marching with packed step and to the shrill whistle of fifes, or riding with jingling chain and clank of sabre to the rattle of kettledrums; guide and chasseur, lancer and dragoon, hussar and cuirassier, in green, blue, or silver-grey, with standard and shabrack; and after them tirailleurs heading the columns of infantry, in dark coats, high bonnets, and with great moustaches bristling over the chin-straps, while gun and caisson clattered alongside and Bessières, surrounded by the dead of the Guard, stood in immortal square, and Lannes flung his devilish battalions into the furnace that presently, ceasing to glow, fell in a cascade of ash that darkened the room till only a man's figure was left brooding over the embers of inspiration.

Next morning the Marquis de Saurans, from the staff of the Comte d'Artois, and the Prefect of the Jura called

on Ney. He was still reading Napoleon's proclamation, and waved it before them. 'That is how the King ought to write. That is the way to stir soldiers.' Then, ignoring his company, he paced the room, still holding the paper from which the astonished Royalists heard him quoting: 'The Eagle with the national colours will fly from steeple to steeple to the towers of Notre-Dame.'

They were witnessing the last hold of the flood-gates, beyond which a full tide was wearing over the levels, and approaching deluge.

When next he turned it was to break into a storm of grievances against the Royalists, and the intolerable atmosphere they had created at court for those of the new order. 'This Comte d'Artois is too fine a gentleman ever to think of inviting a Marshal of France to share his carriage, and now he has left me without troops and without orders.' As for the King, the returned emigrants were leading him into folly. Why else had the Old Guard been disbanded, or, what was truly personal, why had the Tuileries so persistently overlooked the dignity that was due to his wife, Princess of the Moscowa?

Here was a change of front to astonish the Royalists, but it was immediately followed by another outburst against Napoleon. He (Marshal Ney) had good cause to prevent another failure, for as he explained: 'That madman will never forgive me his abdication. He would be quite capable of cutting my head off.' Then he continued: 'I can count on my soldiers. The first man that moves to join him will have my sword through his body, up to the hilt. But the soldier always marches where the cannon clears the way, and my aide-de-camp, Vavas seur, is an expert in working the guns.' . . .

And so on till, with mind and body worn out by the unnatural surfeit, he said good night to his guests, who were left in no little doubt as to which way the lion was turning. But some hours later he was once more showing himself as the zealous Royalist, collecting troops and ammunition, sifting intelligence, and ordering the arrest

of an officer who had shouted: 'Vive l'Empereur!' in a café.

His muster of men, however, remained in the neighbourhood of 6,000, while de Bourmont brought him news that up to the present some 14,000 had rallied to Napoleon. Numbers, responded the devil of excitement that was goading Ney, what of numbers? They were assured of victory. 'I shall take a musket and fire the first shot myself,' said the Marshal, 'and then every one will march as he is told.'

About the same time, at Lyons, Napoleon was discussing the chances of Ney's defection with Baron Fleury. 'I believe that he has had reason to complain of the Court on account of his wife,' the Baron told him. 'She is an affected creature,' put in Napoleon. 'No doubt she has attempted to play the part of a great lady, and the old dowagers have ridiculed her.'

Meanwhile serious news was still arriving at the Golden Apple. The military and civil population were everywhere applauding the tricolour, and the 76th Infantry, instead of marching to Lons-le-Saulnier, had changed their route and gone off to join Napoleon. It was suggested that Ney's little force should combine with the Swiss army that, according to rumour, was coming to help Louis. And once again he puzzled his listeners by declaring: 'If the foreigners set foot in France, it will be time for every Frenchman to stand by Bonaparte.'

The state of the country-side brought a flow of traffic and visitors to the inn, and among them, on that Monday evening, were two strangers who asked for a word with the Marshal. They walked, despite their civilian clothes, with the characteristic bearing of men who embody a certain tradition; and once the door of Ney's room had closed behind them they revealed their identity as officers of the Guard, sent from Lyons with two letters; one from Napoleon and the other from Bertrand, who had followed his chief to Elba.

This was the crucial moment of Ney's decision. Had

he promptly arrested the officers it might have gone far towards fixing his own loyalty to the throne, and removing the ultimate focus of betrayal. Instead of that he broke the seals and read, first Bertrand's letter, which declared that Napoleon's move was no rash enterprise, and warning him that whereas the invasion was so far bloodless any resistance would be the signal for civil war.

Napoleon had written more briefly. After requesting Ney to join him at Châlons he concluded: 'I shall receive you as I did on the morrow of the Battle of the Moscow.' It was clear that the Marshal's threat of an iron cage had not yet reached him.

Ney questioned the officers, who answered with an exaggerated version of the landing and its consequences. The King was said to have left Paris, the Allies were at sixes and sevens, while Austria was supporting Napoleon's venture as part of a new international agreement. Finally, they gave him a proposed proclamation to his troops drawn up by Napoleon, and with the Marshal's title already affixed at the end as an earnest of confirmation.

But still he wavered. Telling the officers they were free to stay at the Golden Apple, he left them, passing another restless night with brain and conscience shot through by the desperate need of a decision. And here, in attempting to judge Ney, we must take stock of the immediate problems before him.

He was pledged to preserve the monarchy by offering resistance to Napoleon. But what of the people, what of the national sentiment? To the most, the Bourbon restoration had been something unnatural, a design forced upon France by her enemies who had first taken alarm at the liberal code of the Revolution; whereas even this latest rumour of the Empire had awakened a spirit that was wholly French, a past which had been defended from the English, Prussian, and Cossack, whose joint forces had carried the new Government to Paris.

That being so, what bond of mutual interest existed

between such Government and the people? The answer was his own bitter experience and the welcome that was being accorded Napoleon, even in parts where his later fame had not been unmingled with criticism. It was clear that the troops, perhaps a majority, were ready to desert the Bourbons; so that even with his men proving obedient the invasion would not be halted.

The general count, as it was apparent to Ney, favoured the Empire—a point of fact which must not be eradicated by our own subsequent knowledge of Waterloo. For that reading of ultimate revelation into past events is a common source of error. We must see them, as it were, limited to the minor facility of a human vision, exactly as modern problems are now appearing. And the horizon extended through those sleepless hours at the Golden Apple was lit by the returning rays of the Empire, inevitable, as some had predicted, and with the utmost he could oppose to them already blinded to extinction.

Besides, what had Napoleon said in his proclamation? 'The Eagle with the national colours will fly from steeple to steeple to the towers of Notre-Dame.' And again: 'I shall receive you as I did on the morrow of the Battle of the Moscowa.' That day when he had exposed himself on a white horse amid the bullets, and cursed Napoleon for not throwing in the Guard to clinch the struggle. What soldiers' tales they had lived out together, and how well Napoleon remembered! And further back, the old wild days when the tramp of ragged men mingled with the bugles of the Sambre-et-Meuse, and a volunteer rabble had been hardened into the immortal old moustaches. Now—a pair of carpet slippers shuffled about the Tuileries, while the sneers and snubs of the Angoulême coterie were sending Aglaé home with tears in her eyes!

He might, of course, have followed the example of other Marshals who, believing that the Empire was as good as restored, and wishing to avoid civil conflict, simply resigned their command and waited events from

a distance. But Ney had ridden in too many vanguards ever to become an idle witness. He knew that the guns were about to open, and like a true soldier of the Napoleonic school he could but march to the sound of their thunder.

Next morning he discussed the situation with his two lieutenants, De Bourmont and Lecourbe; or rather, he attempted to explain the course on which he had obviously settled. All France, he told them, was resuming the tricolour, and nothing could stand in the way of Napoleon's progress. Then it was that the normally blunt and terse soldier, who had never resorted to images or makeshift patterns, indulged a romantic version of the story as though to palliate his own doubtful conscience.

According to this, the plot was an old one of three months' standing which had been drawn up in Paris. There had been a secret exchange of details with the little circle at Elba; Soult was a party to the dealings, and Louis was already in flight from the capital. Part of this had been told him by the messengers, but mostly he had drawn up a surprising and wild vein of fiction which marked him, I think, from the moment of its utterance, for tragedy.

Apart from such futile weaving he might, in view of current possibilities, have declared for Napoleon without great hurt to himself. But that mingling of falsehood and reality indicated the total confusion of a mind past safeguard or relief. Only the highest visionary or stern realist, consciously basing his future upon a half-truth, may live to fulfil it; while Ney, always the reverse of a dreamer, was less practical than trifling in those latter days at Lons-le-Saulnier.

The two officers protested. What of his given word, as a Marshal and Peer of France, that bound him in service to the throne?—a reminder that Ney countered by referring to the various insults he and his kind had suffered in that very service. Louis had failed to respect them; it needed a man of action, like Bonaparte, to deal

with soldiers. So saying, he whipped out the proclamation and, despite further protests, ordered a parade of troops on the Place d'Armes, where he intended to read it.

The scene that followed began in an atmosphere of unsteadiness, and closed down with turmoil. Ney and his staff, who followed from mixed motives, rode to the parade-ground where the 5th Dragoons and 8th Chasseurs were drawn up, with the 60th and 77th Infantry, in hollow square. There was a roll of drums as the Marshal, on foot and with drawn sword, fronted the ranks. Then his voice was heard in the opening phrase of the proclamation: 'Officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers, the cause of the Bourbons is lost for ever——'

That alone was sufficient. A thunderous shout: 'Vive l'Empereur!' with a frenzied forest of caps and weapons rose from the Place. But Ney, still continuing, read to the words: 'Soldiers, I have often led you to victory. Now I am about to lead you to the immortal phalanx which the Emperor is leading on Paris.' . . .

And then it was over. Order, rank, and discipline went to the winds. Between their cheering men embraced each other, colonel and under-officer, sergeant, private and drummer, with the Marshal literally forcing a way through the bursts of greeting. But even now, as the centre of triumph, some noticed that his look was wild and haggard, akin to madness, the look of a man whose peace of mind was passing with the minute.

Some few of the officers, who were determined Royalists, stood straight and silent in the bout of enthusiasm. One of these, a colonel of infantry, spurred his horse through the crowd and, reaching the Marshal, tendered his resignation. While refusing it, Ney told him he was free to go. He clattered off, a handful of dragoons chasing behind him; and that colonel lived to become a general when the Bourbons were re-established.

Meanwhile, with a tramp that recalled the whirlwind manœuvres of the Grand Army, the men were swinging

through the main street back to barracks. Everywhere the white cockade was exchanged for the tricolour; and for the rest of the day they were free to celebrate, in wine-shop and café, the return of the Little Corporal. The streets were bright and crowded till well into darkness. Men could experience again the sense of freedom that comes of a tried and familiar service, while not a glass whose pale or crimson reflection, held to the light, but gave back a promise of victory.

Similar scenes were taking place at the Golden Apple, where Marshal Ney had invited his staff to dinner. He was still subject to opposition, one or two resigning while another, breaking his sword, flung the pieces at Ney's feet. 'You are children,' he told them. 'It is necessary to do one thing or the other. What would you have me do? Can I stop the advancing sea with my hands? Can I go and hide like a coward to avoid the responsibility of events I cannot alter? Marshal Ney cannot take refuge in the dark. There is only one way to deal with the evil—to take one side and avert civil war. By this we shall get into our hands the man who has returned, and prevent his committing further follies. I am not going over to him, but to my country.'

He carried this mood and a tired, harassed look to his guests at table. A score of times he had laughed in such an atmosphere, savouring its tension, the expectant uplift of bugles, of men in harness, and death on the leash. But now he was silent, the one cheerless being in that dining-room at the Golden Apple, perhaps in the whole town where four regiments drank to a cause that was breaking the heart of the great soldier who led them.

Next morning, March 15th, he set out for Dijon, where he arrived two days later, only to find that the Emperor was waiting at Auxerre to receive him. Ney followed, the whole of his route being marked by intermittent desertions; but prior to the meeting he sat down to pen an account, so he informed Bertrand, of his recent conduct. 'What do I want with his explanations?' asked



Napoleon, to whom a tortured and doubtful 'Bravest of the Brave' was an unlooked-for quantity. 'Tell him I shall embrace him to-morrow morning.'

It was the 18th when Emperor and Marshal met again, for the first time since the latter had given tongue to the vital need of abdication on the terrace at Fontainebleau. From the start he was loud and declamatory: 'I love you, sire, but as a son of the Fatherland . . . I was forced to kneel before that fat hog to receive the Cross of St. Louis. Had you not come, we would have chased him away ourselves.' And Napoleon, instantly struck by the difference, turned to another: 'How pale and vacillating Ney is.'

He was still speaking, blaming the journals for having maligned his attitude, which had always been that of a good soldier and a true Frenchman. Then he produced the document he had drawn up during the night, turgid and surprisingly ominous in tone as revealed by the first sentence: 'If you continue to govern tyrannically I shall be your prisoner rather than your partisan.' The Emperor, it went on, must now study the welfare of France, and repair the evils that his ambition had brought upon the people.

Here, instead of the usual welcome, was a downright warning, surely one of the strangest ways of according a renewal of service. And this from the fiery Lorrainer, whose natural bearing would have been to exchange a sword-stroke rather than verbiage, and who recognized an essential division between the military and political outlooks.

Napoleon crumpled the paper with a word to those standing near: 'This fine fellow, Ney, is going mad.' And then, as though the topic had never been, he questioned the Marshal on the state of his men and the country through which he had passed. Ney, in his nervy condition, and painfully aware of the glaring unreality, could barely answer. It was a cold, unfriendly situation, and both would have done well to have parted company

there and then. They distrusted each other. But the interview closed with Ney being instructed to rejoin his column at Dijon, then march to Paris.

On the day of his arrival at Dijon, the 19th, the Court left Paris for Ghent. Sixty cart-loads of silver accompanied the procession of courtiers, peers, and deputies, but Louis was moaning the loss of six clean shirts and his old slippers, which had almost grown to his feet. Macdonald, who continued wearing the white, bundled the jejune assembly out of danger; while 'Long Boots' and the spectre of the Grand Army neared from the south.<sup>1</sup>

Reaching Paris on the 23rd, Ney was immediately ordered to make a tour of inspection of the northern and eastern districts. This occupied him for nearly a month, during which, from his base at Lille, he examined the fortresses, gauged public opinion, and suggested changes in the civil and military organizations.

It was highly exacting work for a man who was still leaving, at every point of his travels, the mark of bewilderment. Night after night found him sleepless; suicide was often in his thoughts; while periods of gloom were broken by bursts of hysteria when he railed at the 'corrupt', 'rascally', and 'cowardly' Bourbons. Those who remained friendly and recollected, with honour, the Ney of 1812, deplored his attitude. But in the eyes of more he was held suspect or condemned as a renegade, which knowledge added to his mental and moral exhaustion.

Throughout the country the miracle of raising another great army was being accomplished. Commands were given to those of the Marshals who had returned, soon or late, to service. Soult was Chief of Staff; Davout, Minister of War; Masséna governed Paris; Suchet covered the Alps; Mortier took over the Young Guard; Grouchy received his baton. Coalesced Europe, having declared Napoleon an outlaw, was arming against him; but Michel Ney still waited a dispatch from the War Office.

<sup>1</sup> See Note 2.

As might be expected, the stories of his anti-Bonaparte fervour had reached the Emperor. Soult was against his being employed in the field, while Napoleon received an anonymous warning that only the most trusted officers should be allowed to work with Ney in his present temper.

It was mid-April when they met again in Paris. The atmosphere continued to be intolerable, and Ney made a half-hearted effort, which had better not have been, to clear it. 'Perhaps you have heard, sire,' he began, 'that before I marched to Besançon I promised the King, here in the Tuileries——'

'Well, what did you promise?' fired Napoleon.

'To bring you back in an iron cage, and place you before his throne,' came the answer.

A silence, then: 'Foolishness! Such threats are unworthy of a soldier.'

'You are mistaken, sire,' hastened Ney; 'allow me to finish. The fact is I had already made up my mind, and I spoke thus in order to cover my real feelings.'

Certain things, we find, after long years, stood out in the memories of those who observed some part of the Revolutionary epic. To some, the crimsoned snow-fields of Russia. Others heard the tramp of the Guard, or saw its bearskins bringing relief at the end of a hopeless day. There was human laughter, with no other cause for jest than its own adversity. Desaix beating up through the smoke at Marengo; Murat, all plumes and vanity, writing his name in hoof-marks at Eylau and Leipzig, or the first thunder of massed guns at Friedland. But one thing was general in the minds of those who encountered it—the Emperor's look, frozen, hard as metal, turning on the offender in scorn or anger.

Thus it was turned on Ney at the moment of his pitiful falsehood. The understanding was mutual. His command was further delayed. And so he went to Coudreaux, passing a few weeks of family existence until, at the end of May, he was called to Paris.

The occasion was a military review and the oath-taking of the Emperor to observe the new constitution. This, the farewell ceremony of his reign, was played out under the bright sunshine of June 1st in the Champ de Mars. The beloved Eagles were entrusted again to the regiments who paraded, 45,000 strong, about an altar where Mass was celebrated by the Archbishop of Tours.

Napoleon arrived on the scene with four of his Marshals, Ney, Soult, Jourdan, and Grouchy. There was music and formalism, marching and show of steel, bowed heads and hurricanes of cheering. Poor Aglaé was happy again in the warmth, with the show and colour that were so dear to her heart and secure, for a while at least, in the acknowledgment of her title. But the brilliance meant nothing to Ney who felt himself the least of the soldiers present, without post and somewhat diffident of recognition. His place in the carriage, behind the Emperor's eight horses, was rather for appearance's sake, and the youngest drummer was a more definite unit in the assembly than the man who, three years earlier, had rescued a Gallic march from cold extinction.

Next day he was told of his election to the new Chamber of Peers, but still no command was forthcoming. On the 6th he visited the palace to draw the expenses of his recent tour, and met Napoleon who remarked: 'So here you are. I was thinking you must have emigrated.' 'Perhaps I ought to have done so before this,' said Ney, and no more passed between them. The Marshal was sadly disillusioned. What of the morrow of the Battle of Borodino?

Events were moving without him. The French army (124,000 men and 370 guns) was concentrating on the Belgian frontier. An Allied force of 105,000 under Wellington was holding the line from Brussels to Mons, while Blücher with 116,000 Prussians stood between Liége and Charleroi. In addition, the Russians and

Austrians were rolling eastward—stupendous odds, even considering the northern front alone where the first great stroke would develop. And if we would know how tenacious was the Revolutionary Thing, and how false are the cursory judgments extended it, we must bear in mind that the country opposing these odds had twice been relegated to the dead; on the frozen flats between Moscow and the Beresina, and a second time on the plains of Saxony.

It was Sunday, June 11th, when Napoleon left for the front. By then Ney had almost ceased to hope for an appointment, and one last visit to the Tuileries, on the day of the Emperor's departure, was still ineffectual. But some hours later a message came through that if Marshal Ney wished for a part in the opening battles he must report at head-quarters, which would be at Avesnes, on the 14th.

A few hours' preparation, a hurried farewell to his family, and soon after dawn, with a single aide-de-camp in attendance, Ney entered a hired carriage and drove from Paris. He put in at head-quarters, already the scene of marching columns and rows of guns, on the afternoon of the 13th. There he was greeted by Napoleon who asked him to dinner, but the meal passed without mention of Ney's appointment.

So far he had been unable to procure horses, and when next day the staff moved to Beaumont he was glad to avail himself of a seat in a farm-cart, travelling as never before and to a campaign in which he appeared forgotten. At Beaumont, however, Mortier obliged him by going sick, and Ney bought his horses, secured a servant, and generally fitted himself for the operations. But still he received no orders, and made his own decision to advance, with the central column, in the direction of Charleroi.

The morning of Thursday, the 15th, found him riding to the crossing of the Sambre along the leafy Charleroi road. It was baking hot, and white dust billowed in

clouds from the men, horses, guns, and wagons seeming to pack the country-side, all jogging forward, with the figure of the Marshal emerging at intervals as he picked a way through the press. Here and there he was recognized, calling forth a cheer or salute, while he heard a remark of one of the veterans: 'Now things are warming up, there goes Carrots.'

So the ranks, at least, remembered him without the need of understanding, and for the first time, since the start of the Hundred Days, his features relaxed in a smile. Moreover, with every foot of the way, the atmosphere was becoming more familiar. It needed but a grain of imagination to smell powder, for gunfire was sounding ahead, and about the bridge of Charleroi there were traces of recent fighting in which their van had captured the town from the Prussians.

Everywhere there were streams of soldiery moving forward, with a battle on the near horizon and Ney, cheered, dusty, but in mounting spirits, riding towards it through the June sunshine. Charleroi was passed, and some way between that town and Gilly he came upon the Emperor at the Belle-Vue Inn, seated in the open on high ground overlooking the Sambre, surrounded by his staff with numerous maps and papers spread on a table, and still the endless files plodding onward to the sound of the cannon.

Ney dismounted. Approaching the group it was clear, by his greeting, that Napoleon was ready to be cordial, while almost at once he assigned the Marshal a foremost place in the field. With the 1st and 2nd Army Corps (Generals d'Erlon and Reille) and a strong body of horse, he was to drive the enemy back along the Brussels road and occupy a position at Quatre Bras; a vital operation which, successfully accomplished, would hold off the mixed force under Wellington while Napoleon dealt with the Prussians.

His command would come into line as the left column, a force of eight infantry divisions, two of cavalry and

twelve batteries of artillery, its approximate strength being 45,000 men and 72 guns. These would later be joined by the light cavalry of the Guard and the younger Kellermann's cuirassiers which, according to the Emperor's instructions, should act as reserve.

The importance of his task was not equalled by its difficulty, for Wellington's concentration was so far incomplete that the Brussels road was practically open. Napoleon, in fact, by his sudden and daring drive into Belgium, had confounded the prophets, and his one slight chance of success—in separately engaging and defeating the Allied armies—had not been lessened by the immediate prospects of contact.

But weakness there was on the French side, and a weakness that came from within. For the great Napoleonic family had been broken up, and its house was divided. Most of the Marshals were holding aloof, and those who came back to the tricolour were not employed to the utmost of their advantage. Davout and Suchet should have been in the field; Soult was a better tactician than Chief-of-Staff, and Grouchy was given a post far in excess of his talent.

Yet none of these were so unfit for a crisis as Marshal Ney. The Emperor could appreciate nothing of the struggle which had led to his recent hysteria, otherwise he would hardly have pointed to the 'Goddams' and the Brussels road as goal for a man of conscience who yet doubted the tendency of his honour.

## CHAPTER XI

### WATERLOO

THE importance of Quatre Bras in the operations derived from the fact that one of its great highways, that extending from Namur to Nivelles, was marked as the Prussian centre; and this, by opening a line of communication south of Mont St. Jean and Wavre, would enable Wellington to bring his left in contact with Blücher. Ney was entrusted with the task of preventing such a move by holding on at Quatre Bras, a simple enough plan which yet, for no apparent reason apart from his previous failing, he only grasped when it was too late to recover.

General Reille, with a division of the 2nd Corps, opened an attack on Gosselies, a step to the main objective, which soon fell. Ney was already on the scene with some light cavalry, and although Reille's battalions, in pursuing the Prussians, were checked at the north end of the village and driven back, the Marshal was strangely inactive. He might have strengthened the advance and gone on even to the cross-roads; instead he halted with the cavalry some two miles short of the way, near Frasnes, while his tired corps dropped asleep on the ground they had occupied.

Meanwhile the French were exposed to artillery fire from Frasnes. Reinforcements were hurried up and the Allied posts, withdrawing in the direction of Quatre Bras, finally came to a halt in the wood of Bossu. Ney went on towards the cross-roads, but his only force was a single battalion and the cavalry. With these he drew up, about seven o'clock, in front of the position he was to have occupied, and found it held by over 4,000 of the enemy with six guns.

He had even neglected to ascertain their strength



before moving, and now, with Reille and d'Erlon well to the rear, he was quite outnumbered and fell back after a skirmish. In spite of the odds, however, an attack on Quatre Bras at that time would have been successful, as the defenders were hopelessly short of ammunition. Ney could not be expected to know this; but his general dispositions had been faulty, he lacked vigour, and only informed the Emperor late on the 15th that he was back again in Gosselies and Frasnes, when he should have been established at Quatre Bras.

Yet so far the Emperor's plan might still be accomplished. Blücher was concentrating at Ligny, where the main French blow would be struck while Ney, swinging part of his troops against the Prussians, would continue holding Wellington with the remainder.

But speed was necessary, for the British were about to move in force from Brussels. That night of the 15th heard the 'sound of revelry' and saw the candelabra glow in the Duchess of Richmond's ballroom. The early hours of morning brought a noise of cannon; bugles sounded the 'Assembly'; officers, in buckled shoes and silk stockings, hurried through the streets to their regiments; and by three o'clock, when the Duchess woke her little girl to fasten Wellington's sword, the French had virtually lost their chance of seizing the cross-roads.

All that day, Friday the 16th, there was firing between the outposts as the British reinforced their positions. But Ney, with his corps still in bivouac between Gosselies and Marchienne, frittered away the precious time without attacking, or even preparing to advance. He appeared to be *waiting* for orders, while with Wellington on the scene by mid-morning the Allies were hourly consolidated in Quatre Bras.

Time was when Ney would have swept down the road in defiance of orders, preferring rather to compromise the Grand Army than to stand by inactive. But those were his vanguard days when the Marshals had lived

by faith, faith in the legacy of the Revolution and the Emperor's star which now, nearing extinction, implied a disaster no less than the guns and men who were hurrying out from Brussels. Picton's brigades and a strong force of Germans were coming after; but the French staff work continued faulty, while Napoleon's dispatches were so worded as to require a more analytical and penetrative mind than Ney's to interpret them exactly.

No less than nine dispatches reached him that Friday, and the most vital of these, coming late in the afternoon, indicated that his main duty was no longer at Quatre Bras but at Ligny, where his co-operation was needed to cut off the Prussians. This implied deviation, and (to Ney) its somewhat ambiguous wording, must be remembered in fairness to the Marshal, who none the less was condemnable for his earlier lack of insight and energy.

He persisted in estimating the growing rally at Quatre Bras as a mere rear-guard of Germans, but took no step to verify his assumption. Word reached him that Kellermann's cuirassiers would join him at Gosselies, to which point d'Erlon's corps had been directed. Ney himself was at Frasnes. Everything pointed to a coming advance, and at last he received the definite instruction to form his line at Quatre Bras or beyond it.

But instead of storming the place he issued a number of marching orders, which eventually had the effect of concentrating Reille's corps and some of the cavalry at Frasnes. From there, still judging that Quatre Bras would fall without a struggle, he decided to clear the Bossu wood where he was again sanguine of little or no resistance.

The ground rose from his front to a high, corn-covered ridge, set with farms and a hamlet and along which, broad and bare in the sunlight, went the Brussels road. Beyond was the green fringe of Bossu, not empty or weakly held, as Ney had imagined, but lined with steel, a consideration that turned his attack to the left of the enemy's line which, extending for over a mile,

should have indicated that Wellington was there in force and meaning to contest the position.

Shortly after two the French columns began their advance, with artillery serving between them, cavalry holding the left flank and in the centre, and again closing the rear in massed formation. The guns opened against the ridge while the attack went forward through the standing corn and east of the roadway, where the Dutch defenders were soon driven from Gémioncourt farmhouse and the buildings of Pirremont.

Ney led the attack and, as usual, had a horse killed under him; then he returned to the centre, launching further assaults on the southern and eastern borders of Bossu. The wood was well defended apart from its undergrowth, which was so thick that the attackers had first to clear a way with swords before engaging.

Simultaneously the French horse beat through the cornland on the right of the road. Here a surprise awaited them, for eight English and four Hanoverian battalions, almost concealed in the tall grain, checked the advance with a well-directed volley. One of Halkett's regiments, the 69th, lost a colour, which was presented to Ney by the trooper who had captured it, an incident that led the brigadier, a typical British die-hard, to remark that it was 'most extraordinary, as one of the colours never appeared after the regiment had been broken up by the French'. But the attack failed, and for the first time Ney realized the extent of the resistance which had banked up before him. His main hope was the arrival of d'Erlon, whose march had been halted by the troop movements early in the day.

Meanwhile at Ligny, seven miles off, the Emperor was dealing his master-stroke at the Prussians and scrawling the dispatches to Ney, who, providing he was not heavily engaged at Quatre Bras, as Napoleon believed, could execute a decisive move by falling on the right and rear of Blücher. One of these messages was carried by an inexperienced staff officer, who came

upon d'Erlon before he had reached Frasnes with word that the chief objective was now eastward, to cut off the Prussian retreat from Ligny. Thus informed d'Erlon struck off in that direction, a change that was made known to the Marshal some time later when, with more British arriving on the scene, the 1st Corps was being awaited to avoid disaster.

It must be repeated that Napoleon viewed Quatre Bras as a means of checking rather than defeating the British, whose turn, he intended, should follow that of Blücher. But Ney had largely upset this calculation by wasting time until he became involved in a definite battle, so that apart from the doubt of holding his own he could certainly not spare a move to round off Napoleon's victory.

It was to encounter such failure that he had struggled with his conscience, tainting himself in the eyes of many, and losing even the confidence of the Emperor. Given the impetus of his old days, and what might have been accomplished! But now he was thwarted on a lost field, with his wayward loyalty still unjustified. The shot from a fronting battery tore up the near-by ground, to his exclamation: 'Ah, those English balls! I wish they would kill me!'

At five o'clock he received the Emperor's three-fifteen dispatch, with its primary instruction to turn east and march against Blücher. Napoleon had said that if Ney was sufficiently vigorous the Prussians would be destroyed, and not a single piece of artillery could escape him. Then came the reminder: 'The fate of France is in your hands.'

It found Ney desperate and powerless. But, to his heated condition, any effort was better than none, and assuming Napoleon had misjudged the state of things at Quatre Bras he broke into orders. It might be that, by securing his present position, he could still co-operate with the 1st Corps to cut off the Prussians. D'Erlon must therefore come back to Frasnes—this in defiance of

the Emperor, which was sufficient ground for a court martial, and forgetting that he could not arrive there by daylight.

Then he turned to the younger Kellermann who, with his two regiments of cuirassiers, the 8th and 11th, had encountered Picton's musketry in the cornfield. The safety of France was at stake, he told him. They must charge, into Wellington's squares, or Quatre Bras if necessary; anyhow, *make the effort!*

Kellermann, who had nothing to learn in the matter of bravery, but was clearer headed than Ney at the moment, reminded him that the 5th and 6th Lancers, who could have supported, had been sent to the rear. 'Never mind, charge with what you have,' shouted the Marshal. 'Crush them under your feet. I will send the rest of the cavalry after you. Get on. Get on at once!'

There was nothing for it. Kellermann ranged his squadrons and led them, at full trot, to the high ground between Gémioncourt and Quatre Bras. Then, to prevent the impression of great odds sinking home, he dropped the preliminaries for a sudden: 'Charge at full gallop. Forward march!'

Trumpets sounded, the riders in the first rank bent low while those behind flourished their weapons, and down went the avalanche, speed increasing at every step and the ground churned into dust-clouds by the flying hoofs that sent up a shower of loosened clods; Kellermann, leading like a gentleman, twenty paces ahead of the front squadron, over the acres of trampled corn into the three sides presented by as many English regiments, met by a hail of bullets but breaking through and mounting the ridge where the batteries were unlimbered, cutting down the gunners, then on through a hedge of Germans to the very cross-roads, where they finally melted under a compact musketry and gunfire.

The lancers had been sent for too late and emerged from the tall crops to find the squares drawn up and ready. Time and again Ney's light cavalry broke itself

on the rock of bayonets, only to share the fate of the cuirassiers whose glittering wreckage marked the road from corny upland to the hamlet of Quatre Bras.

All this while more of the Anglo-Dutch were arriving from Brussels, and Wellington prepared his offensive. Ney had thrown over the externals of command and was fighting in the front like an under-officer, losing his second horse. Then it was that an urgent dispatch reached him. Whatever the position at Quatre Bras, wrote Napoleon, the 1st Corps must execute its march to cut off the Prussians. And coming at such a time, with the British about to attack, it meant the last of Ney's self-possession.

Fiery with rage, and brandishing his sword like a madman, he spat out that he had already recalled d'Erlon to that part of the field, so back d'Erlon must come. It was no use the aide-de-camp who had brought the message trying to remonstrate. The Marshal-Prince, after a storm of word and gesture that recalled his disappointment on the day of the Moscowa, turned back to the fighting. The British assault was under way and his ranks must be ordered; besides, it was easier meeting bullets than the uncontrollable drift of men and moments.

By the time Ney's countermand reached him, d'Erlon had come within sight of the Prussian defeat at Ligny. He at once concluded that the Marshal must have good cause for such a step and wheeled about in the direction of Frasnes, arriving there at nine o'clock, having failed to intercept the Prussians and too late to be of assistance at Quatre Bras. For Ney was already back on the line he had held at midday, after a record, first of inaction then of muddled purpose, that does more to reveal his state than any excited pose or burst of frenzy.

The 17th brought a letter from Napoleon to the Marshal, regretting his failure to co-operate and so destroy part of the enemy. But the primary resolve, however imperfect, had been achieved. There was no point of junction between Blücher, who was retiring to

the north-east, and the British, who would have to stand their ground or fall back in the direction of the capital. Grouchy was sent to follow and ward off the Prussians, while the rest of the French Army combined for a move on Quatre Bras and the mixed force under Wellington.

But the chapter of Ney's failure was not yet ended. With the Allies about to retire he should have pressed them ceaselessly at the cross-roads, instead of which it was past noon when he fell in with the main columns advancing from the Emperor. True enough, the general order was late in reaching him, but so clear was the situation that he could not have erred by anticipating the obvious passage.

Once his corps was moving he rode forward to meet Napoleon, who asked why he was not already in Quatre Bras. The explanation, that he had been faced by an entire army instead of a rear-guard, was in no way relevant to his tardy conduct; and even now they encountered a mere mask of cavalry between them and Wellington, who had been left free to fall back and grope for the Prussians.

Napoleon turned on his Marshal with the words: 'You have ruined France!' Then, at the head of a crowd of horse and a single battery, he set off in pursuit. The recent hot weather was giving way to a storm which broke, in huge drops of rain and claps of thunder, as the running lasted for ten miles, till early evening, when Napoleon came to a halt at La Belle Alliance.

The rain had stopped, but a light mist veiled the ridge of Mont St. Jean across the valley, where troops were standing—a rear-guard, perhaps, or Wellington's mixed army. Napoleon threw out a feeler, in the shape of a pretended cavalry charge and a few bursts of gunfire. Instantly a terrific answering peal closed that day of tremors with the revelation that not part but the whole of Wellington's force was massed in the half-light on the northern slope, between which and his own position stretched the long and miry decline of Waterloo.

Ney stood at Genappe for the night. His round of bivouacs showed men in the last stage of discomfort, all muddy, some bootless from struggling over the ploughlands, lying flat on the watery earth or in clusters of tall rye, the cavalry still in the saddle to escape the mud, with heads bent over their horses' necks, no food for hours, and streaks of lightning playing over the dreary vigil.

By eight o'clock on the next morning of Sunday, June 18th 1815, he was at head-quarters, where word was given for a concentration at nine a.m. On the face of things the French, with 72,000 men and 246 pieces of artillery, could be counted upon to defeat Wellington's 68,000 and 156 guns (this last figure is uncertain—it was probably higher), providing Grouchy played his part on the right flank and held off the Prussians.

Blücher was at Wavre, twelve miles east of the engagement, at which he was calculated to arrive in the afternoon. In fact, it was only on account of his promise to do so that Wellington stood at bay and thundered an echo to the challenge on Mont St. Jean.

An early sun came out with a drying wind that fluttered the pennons on either extremity of the French line, as Ney accompanied the Emperor on a round of inspection. Every slope and summit, it seemed, had its burden of rye, very tall and beginning to turn yellow. Over there, in front of the British right, was the farmhouse of Hougomont, with its fine approach of elm-trees and set in a beech copse, while more to the centre were the buildings of La Haye Sainte. The Marshal was given direction of the main attacks against the enemy centre, a vital post as cutting the British line of retreat, and also dividing them from the Prussians *in case* Grouchy, with his 33,000, made a blunder.

Half-past eleven sounded from the clock-tower of Plancenoit, and some minutes later a gun on the French left fired the signal. Napoleon had waited till then for the ground to dry, and so facilitate movement, but in effect those few hours had cost him the battle. Ney,



as he afterwards said in Paris, behaved like a madman, and Grouchy's operations were as stagnant as the ground they covered. But had he attacked in the early morning the British must have been lost before the French errors, or Blücher's arrival, had proved effective. During the inspection Ney had mistaken some troop movements for a general retreat, and urged the Emperor to go forward. The time was apt although the inference was at fault, but Napoleon never doubted that Wellington was standing to offer them, as he called it, 'a mere breakfast'.

The first move was against Hougomont, where the woodland fell to the French, while Ney prepared a main attack in the centre. D'Erlon's corps, in four great columns, and a backing of 74 guns, were massed in front of La Belle Alliance. The columns moved in close order with a battalion front, in echelons by the left, and separated by intervals of 400 yards—an excellent target, and liable, on difficult ground, to lose formation.

It was two o'clock when, with Ney and d'Erlon leading, they went forward. Drums beat the *pas de charge* to an accompaniment of overhead gunfire, down they went into a hollow, then up the slope where the Redcoats waited, through mud or trampling the sodden corn while men slipped and fell in a growing disorder, holding fire till the range was less than thirty yards, then charging through the grounds of La Haye Sainte, where the buildings still held, passing Papelotte on the right and so to the very crest of Mont St. Jean and the British position.

There Picton commanded. With a word he swung horse and foot against the attackers and fell next moment, shot through the temple. But the French broke under the sabring. It was now that Ney lost the first of his Waterloo horses, but mounting another he tried to rally the flying left before he, too, was swept backward. Eventually he was able to re-form, while apart from further attacks on Hougomont this phase of the battle

passed to both sides of artillery. The French canister was particularly effective in raking the squares, and for some time the volume of fire was the most terrific in veteran experience.

Another attempt was made on La Haye 'Sainte, the Marshal still leading in person and almost to the walls behind which, however, the garrison had been reinforced. A point-blank volley decided the issue, the advancing brigade fell back, and once more the artillery duel broadened.

But already the hands in the clock-tower had pointed four, and many a look was turning to the north-east where, from a stretch of woodland, a dark shadow that the French staff knew to be troops was slowly emerging. These troops were the Prussian vanguard, their army by this time being nearer the field than Grouchy, who was still marching away from the cannon. But so far identity was uncertain though the Emperor was sufficiently anxious to move a corps in that direction, which left him with no reserve apart from the Guard.

The crux of the battle was the routing of the British squares, and that before the Prussians could reach them. Through his glass Ney saw a stir and cloud of dust on the road to Brussels, where the Allied wounded and stragglers (according to some, the first of an actual retreat), were already in movement. This, he judged, with a haste that was no less fatal than the lack of initiative he had shown at Quatre Bras, was the moment of victory. There stood the French horse, cuirassiers, lancers, and chasseurs of the Guard. He might have massed his artillery with telling result, or drawn on the obvious fact that the British foot were not so shaken as to have lost the natural advantage of their kind over cavalry. But he was once more the impetuous and ordered a cuirassier brigade, without the essential infantry support, to make the first of those mad, hopeless, and heroic charges that dotted the plain of Waterloo for the next two hours, four great onsets which broke

into a number of minor assaults, and left a dying fringe on the squares in witness of the regiments who had lately followed the kettle-drums out of Paris.

His first order was questioned by the brigadier, on the ground that he was directly responsible to General Milhaud, divisional commander. Very well, decided the Marshal, Milhaud will charge with his whole division, and proceeded to form the cavalry in a slope to the left of the highway. They set off, with Ney still leading, at a slow canter, rising from the hollow through the interminable mud, where horses sank to the knees, and cornfields breast-high to the rider.

'He has compromised us again,' growled Soult, watching the advance, 'as he did at Jena.' 'It is too early by an hour,' agreed Napoleon, 'but we must support him now that he has done it.'

A trot, and they encountered the last discharge of the British gunners before, spurring to a gallop, they broke through the batteries. Beyond were the squares, an outer hedge of bayonets enclosing the fire which broke on the horsemen at a distance of thirty yards, bullets sounding like hail on the cuirasses, plumes falling, riders starting out of their seats, the press so great that horses, rearing and plunging, were fairly lifted from the ground, the leading squadrons forming a rampart of dead and dying through which some backed or struggled on to the steel, but the charge itself broken by the steady firing only to form again, in front of the squares, for another onset.

Up and down went the squadrons, ranging at every block of resistance where the pressure of man and beast, blade, musket, and hideous mangling scorched in the atmosphere. Two hours, and the French cavalry reserve was nearly exhausted. More fodder was necessary, and Ney's eye encountered the carabiniers, in their splendid gold and drawn up some little distance from the fighting. He waved them on, their commander remonstrating at the added carnage, and falling in with the broken regiments the last cavalry charge went forward, a hecatomb

of seventy-seven squadrons whose 'devotion was invincible', as one of the defenders said, but withdrawing as the others had done to keep up a desultory annoyance with carbines.

A moment's vision of Ney, as they cut through the batteries, showed a man on foot (for two more horses had been killed under him), his uniform shredded, shouting and beating a gun with the flat of his sword. According to the rules of the art of war, these charges were inexcusable. But in spite of their ruin the end would have been achieved had the bulk of the French infantry been able to follow. Many of the British squares were still unbroken, but others had ceased to exist. Yet the French were being held by a growing pressure, at first restricted to their right, as the van of the Prussian Army deployed for action.

It was now that Ney, with a vigour reinforced by a return of judgment, gathered his infantry for another desperate rush on La Haye Sainte. This time they reached the walls, mounted the roof of the stable and broke through the gateway. A new lust of battle and hope for victory fired the Marshal, who now demanded more troops, troops to fling on the left and right centre of the Allies, where weakness was apparent—a true estimate, but requiring the last of Napoleon's muster, the Imperial Guard, who only struck when the day was at hazard.

Napoleon hung in doubt. There was no mistaking the Prussian arrival, but to allay panic he spread a report that it was Grouchy coming over the hill-side. The ranks were heartened, while Ney, rather than gloss the situation, pointed him back to the British centre, withdrawn beyond the fire of French batteries, fronted by its own line of guns that had been left useless and overturned by the cavalry charges, and more movement, as though of retreat, surging up the roadway to Brussels.

Plancenoit was stroking seven. Above was a clouded sunset, while evening mist hung in the valley. A growing thunder on the right told of a heavier engagement

where Blücher's brigades, extending over the eastern skyline, prepared to descend with a minimum of 50,000 on the French rear. Wellington, his anxiety removed, closed up and reinforced the vital centre. And now that neither skill, tactics, nor heroism could save him, now that victory was impossible and the most to be hoped for was a safe retirement, Napoleon called on Ney to lead his Guard in a final venture.

Tall in their cloak and bearskin, with the undefeated tradition of twenty years, the Old and Middle (for the Young Guard had been sent to the threatened right), formed in a dip of ground near La Belle Alliance. Their numbers were not great, 5,000 in four solid columns by echelons, with the Emperor's own hand marking the direction and the 'Bravest of the Brave', first mounted, then later on foot, to point his sword in the forefront.

Not a shout or a drum-tap followed them. With presented arms and ranks in review order, as though at the Tuileries, they traced the slant of ground in the wake of the cavalry wreckage instead of beating straight up to the centre. This way was unprotected from the point-blank discharges of the English guns, double-shotted or loaded with grape, that mowed them down at 200 yards only for the ranks to form again and emerge, through the drifting smoke-cloud, still firm and facing on to the hidden Redcoats.

And now a silence, that hung in the memory of those present, compelling as the hush of a forest in the moment of coming storm, descended upon the field of watchers as that great spectacle, the last attack of the Grand Army—the farewell of the Bearskins—drove to a finish.

At short range the cream of the British infantry, Maitland's Guards, poured in a volley that literally blasted the first column. The second and third, following a slightly oblique course that led them to the right, presented a target that was at once seized by Colborne, colonel of the British 52nd.<sup>1</sup> Swinging his line in advance

<sup>1</sup> See Note 3.

of and perpendicular to the main defence, he broke them with a devastating flank fire, both columns together.

A terrible cry, unheard of any man or part of the earth until that moment, rose to the sunset: 'The Guard gives way!' Reinforcements, hurrying up to support them, doubted the echo at first, but, halting, heard again those unbelievable tidings: 'The Guard gives way!' Then, indeed, the soldier might know that his own world, the world of Napoleonic fantasy, was ending. As though to mock them the clouds broke and a watery radiance lightened the English position, where rose the silhouette of its commander waving his cocked hat as the line swept forward to close, with that of the Prussians, on the lost army.

In spite of its ending, that day had belonged to the Marshal, than whom no soldier has ever so imprinted himself on any one field or record, and in every phase of the fighting. The great charges, whether of foot or cavalry, had found him leading. Five horses had gone down under him, and now his figure dominated the rout, ordering, entreating, or shaming it to rally and die with discipline.

Above the rabble he caught sight of d'Erlon, and shouted: 'If you and I escape from this we shall be hanged!' He was seeking death, but yet he lived and was carried back with the fugitives, more beast than man in appearance with his face blackened by powder, his uniform in tatters, an epaulette hanging by a thread and only his voice: 'Have you forgotten how to die?' proclaiming the Duke of Elchingen and Prince of the Moscowa.

Across the field a brigade was moving in tolerable order, and forcing a way through he halted and faced them about. 'Stop and see how a Marshal of France can die!' They stood, until blown away by artillery or crushed by the sabres. But Ney was left, searching for another command in the human wreckage and finding it

near La Belle Alliance, three squares of the 4th Chasseurs of the Guard, into which he entered.

It was a wonder how he could stand for exhaustion (the reckless spending of himself in the battle had followed four days without sleep), and now, in a moment's respite of retiring under attack, he was glad of a corporal's arm to support him. Shoulder to shoulder, with an ever-diminishing front, an ever-failing defiance of steel and musket, the squares stood out in the panic of that summer night. Then they, too, were enveloped, and Marshal Ney, with no more troops to command, set his face to the deepening dusk of the Genappe road.

Behind was a glare of burning. The Prussian trumpets menaced pursuit, but yet, at the bidding of the same fate by which he had outlived the last of the squares, he went uncaptured and eventually, obtaining a horse, rode off in search of the Emperor. He was followed by a sound that, drifting over the battlefield, was carried by the fugitives who heard it to the four corners of refuge.

Somewhere, breasting the flood of broken and bewildered men, the Grenadiers of the Guard were escorting Napoleon out of danger. A chosen company, with no man wearing less than two stripes and four in every ten with the Legion of Honour. Now and again they paused, to correct dressing, with all the while the drum-beat of their march, *La Grenadière*, rolling as though in salute of a passing tradition, of a spirit that was invincible though men and even the Empire should come to havoc, terrible, and touching the heart with deadly pathos.

Those drums of the Guard! Years later, wherever the grizzled survivors of that day met together, in Parisian café or by quiet windings of the Rhône, their rolling was heard again, full of state and dignity. And in that moment talk returned to the Marshal whose broken sword had been a symbol of honour, to the hymn of thanksgiving bawled by Lutheran throats, the strains of a British band, and a young moon lending its light for

the slaughter, but always, sadly insistent, the rolling drum-beat.

Under a tranquil sky Ney rode into Marchienne. He learnt that the Emperor had passed through Charleroi, safe for the moment, but that no rally could be attempted. By then it was near dawn, the street lamps were expiring, and he rested there for the night, intending to reach Beaumont on the morrow. Half-way, however, he was directed, by the presence of Allied cavalry, on to Avesnes. All was confusion, and securing a post-chaise he drove to Paris, where he arrived on the morning of Wednesday, June 21st.



## CHAPTER XII

### THE LAST VOLLEY

SIXTEEN years earlier the fate of France had virtually been decided by the poetic instinct of Lucien Bonaparte. It was he who whispered the word 'Dictatorship' to his brother, and then, with a confident vision, had made its seizing the practical end of the Revolution. Lapse of time and the loss of battle are no great things to balance the working of a poet's mind, and now, after the failure of Waterloo, he repeated that whisper.

Dissolve the Chambers, declare yourself dictator a second time, he urged Napoleon. They were clamouring for his abdication. Defy them, by pretending an army could still be raised and the war continued! Remember his son's succession, which would again be lost by surrendering to the Allies!

Lucien was supported in this by Marshal Davout and Carnot, Minister of the Interior. But these were not the days of St. Cloud, where the first great 'Dare!' had originated. For Napoleon to have turned his sword against the Chambers would have brought the country to civil war, and the confidence by which genius justifies its acts in the ultimate was no longer with him. He was deaf to Lucien's proposals, and saw no course but a second Bourbon restoration.

The same outlook was shared by Ney, who had made his plans for leaving France if necessary. He was aware that if the Royalists struck, as now they were safe to do, he would be marked as a victim, which made him allow for the possibilities of secret flight. Obtaining two passports, one was made out in his own and the other in the name of Michel Theodore Neubourg, merchant, who was further said to be travelling with his secretary and four servants. Then from the Ministry of Police,

where this was done, Ney repaired to the Chamber of Peers, where Carnot was seeking a way for the dictatorship party.

According to the note he was reading, Grouchy had defeated the Prussians and was returning to Paris with his victorious army of 60,000. Ney followed with an instant denial. 'The enemy has triumphed at every point,' he told the assembly. 'I witnessed the disaster, for I commanded the army under the Emperor.' At most Grouchy was leading 25,000, and so far from being destroyed the greater part of the Prussians had not been in action. All that remained was to bargain with the Allies, who in a week would be occupying the capital.

Certain of the peers remonstrated, on the ground that he would have done better to plan a resistance. 'Well, gentlemen,' Ney answered, 'I spoke only in the interest of the country. I know quite well that if Louis XVIII comes back, I shall be shot.'

He was, in fact, open to danger from both sides. According to the Royalists, he had been proved a traitor, while some of the Bonapartists held him responsible for their military and political failure. First, he had taken a chief part in Napoleon's abdication. At Waterloo he had shown a pitiful lack of judgment, and now, instead of braving the foreigner, he was ready to give up the last of their cause without a struggle.

Once again, as at Lons-le-Saulnier, the ordeal of being exposed to adverse winds, without the hope of trimming a sail to either, resulted in desperation. He was culprit or scapegoat, never a plain soldier whose fault had been to confuse duty with conscience instead of diplomatic cunning, as the peculiar situation of France demanded. And on the 26th, driven by impulse, he defended himself in a letter to the Provisional Government.

'I hope,' he wrote, 'the brave men who have survived this terrible battle will do me the justice to say that they saw me on foot, sword in hand, during the whole of the evening, and that I only quitted the scene of carnage

among the last and at the moment when retreat was inevitable.' So much for the genuine part of his letter, which elsewhere perverted the sequence of disaster on the 17th and 18th. His lack of initiative in front of Quatre Bras was unreflected to, while he was far from accepting the blame for d'Erlon's fatal marches. But he had reached the point when it was easier to deal in obvious falsehood than bear in silence, a state of mind helped by the suspicion that Napoleon was encouraging the rumours against him.

On the 25th the King issued a proclamation, which in effect was a warning to those who had donned the tricolour during the Hundred Days. Old Blücher had already sworn to hang Bonaparte, and now the Royalists came into the open with a promise to reward here or punish there, according to service. The chief offender in their eyes was Marshal Ney, though even his case could be regarded as less serious once the Convention of Paris had been signed on July 3rd.

Wellington and Blücher were the signatories, and their sovereigns ratified the terms including the cogent Article 12 which Davout, anticipating the punishment of 'traitors', had insisted upon. This was tantamount to a free pardon for all who might be suspected in the capital, irrespective of their late conduct or opinion, an act that was binding on Louis in so far as it was agreed to by the Allies, on whom he depended. So general, in fact, was this view of the King's responsibility, that a suggested clause permitting the emigration of all those who wished to leave France was ruled out as unnecessary.

But no sooner had it been signed than the Royalists were quite prepared to limit the extent of the agreement to the Allies, thus leaving themselves free to act against those who had recently declared for Bonaparte. Ney scented danger, but still could not bring himself to follow a definite line of conduct. One moment he determined to leave Paris; next he was even hoping for a command under the Provisional Government. But mainly his

thought turned upon flight as the ultimate necessity, and he got so far as obtaining letters of introduction to a French merchant in New Orleans.

Yet still he remained in Paris, apparently blind to the peril or too tired for a precautionary effort. His friends and relatives showed a more vital sense of the situation, which, however, when exhibited, had the effect of driving Ney into nervous sarcasm. On one occasion Aglaé knelt and implored him to leave, only to be taunted with: 'It seems, Madame, that you are in a hurry to get rid of me.'

But there was no denying the portent of July 6th, when English and Prussian troops entered the boulevards. And that same evening, when so much valuable time had passed, a man in civilian clothes turned out of the Rue de Bourbon. It was Marshal Ney, intending to reach Switzerland.

On the 9th he was at Lyons, where a friendly police official advised him to change his route for St. Alban, near Roanne, as elsewhere the principal ways were held by the Austrians who also had entered France. Acting on this Ney remained at St. Alban for a fortnight, still restless and wavering between plans for a further refuge or, in more hopeful vein, the improvements he had thought of effecting on his Coudreaux estate. At the end of that time he was able to obtain a travelling permit in the name of Major Michel Reiset of the 3rd Hussars, said to be under orders for Toulouse, and thus covered he made his way into Roanne.

There he received a letter from his wife on the 25th, informing him of two decrees which had just been issued in Paris. By the first he had been deprived of his dignity as a Peer of France; the second, containing a list of those who were ordered to be tried by court martial on the charges of conspiring against the interests of the people, the security of the Crown, and the peace of Europe, was headed by his own name.

So much for the responsibility incurred by Royalists

under the terms of capitulation. The extremists were to have their way in pursuing a policy of vengeance, and already Blücher was stamping about Paris choosing the sites and monuments that, like a true forerunner of Kultur, he meant to demolish.

Ney was now a fugitive in good earnest, and four days later, adopting the name Escaffre, he took shelter with one of his wife's relations. The place was the château of Bessonis, near Aurillac, on the fringe of the hilly country known as the Cantal—a natural refuge, judging by the appearance of the district, which probably inspired the Marshal with undue confidence. At any rate, he was seen in public two days after his arrival; and on August 2nd a Royalist informed the Prefect that a strange visitor, who answered the description of Ney, was now at the château. Next the relationship between the residents and the wanted soldier was brought to light; and on the following day a party of gendarmes appeared in the courtyard, while others were posted at the entrance.

The Marshal's window, admitting a view of the scene, was flung open. 'Who are you looking for?' When they had told him he offered to show them the quarry. There was no chance of escaping, and as they crossed from the stairway to his room he met them with the words: 'I am Marshal Ney.' Having seized his papers and belongings he was taken to the town-hall at Aurillac; and on the 15th Captain Jomard, with two lieutenants of the Royal Guard, took him over from the local authorities and started for Paris.

There was gloating in the opposite camp with, perhaps, one solitary exception. That was the incapable Louis, who, less royal than some of his supporters, voiced the opinion that Ney was likely to cause more embarrassment now he had been arrested than actually by betraying them. Part of his difficulty began with a petition, and later a visit, from Aglaé, to whom he could hold out no promise. Meanwhile a post-chaise, with an escort of mounted gendarmes, was bearing the prisoner through

Clermont Ferrand, Moulins, and Nevers back to the capital.

In order to spare himself the humiliation of journeying under arrest Ney had given his parole. But he had also underrated the temper of the German and Muscovite occupations, which showed itself whenever they halted for the business of passports. Officers and men gathered round the carriage, pointing and gibing, till more than once it seemed he would not reach Paris alive. At one of the villages Jomard made a protest to the crowd, and was answered by a shower of stones, while a band of Cossacks, more threatening than the Germans, attached themselves to the carriage for the last few miles.

On the occasion of a quieter halt, where Ney stretched his legs for a moment, a soldier in undress uniform pushed through the crowd. It was General Exclmans, one of the finest sabre leaders under the Empire, and grasping Ney's hand he offered to stage a rescue at the next village. 'No, I cannot. I have given my parole,' explained the Marshal.

He found Aglaé waiting, on the morning of August 19th, at the post-house by the southern barriers of Paris, where they changed horses. Some time was allowed them, and on rejoining his escort the 'Bravest of the Brave' was seen to be crying. 'You are surprised,' he put to the officers. 'It is not for myself, but my family.' Entering Paris he was lodged in a cell at the Conciergerie, where the following register was taken: Age, 46; height, 5 feet 9 inches; hair, light chestnut; eyes, blue; nose and mouth, medium; chin, full; face, long; complexion, clear.

Between exercise in the courtyard he asked for a flute to play in his cell, which at first was given him. He was a middling player, but even so the instrument held something of comfort. This, then, was the outcome of the years of victory, and the fearful retreats he had converted into more than triumphs! A gloomy cell, and a length of drilled wood that was soon taken away as unseemly for an atmosphere of guilt and studied depression.

On the 20th he was examined by the Prefect of Police. At first he was silent, and remained so throughout when questioned as to the names of the officers who had brought the decisive word to the Golden Apple. But as part of the propaganda against him it was declared he had taken money from the King, which he strongly refuted, while admitting that unfortunate reference to an iron cage. As for his own change of front he protested loyalty until, as he put it, he was swept away by the torrent. People and events had misled him. 'Often since then I have thought of blowing my brains out, but have not done so because I wished for justification. I did wrong and reproach myself for it, but I am not a traitor.'

His enemies, however, were angling for a charge of wilful treason, and two days later he was again questioned on the same topic. How can one explain so sudden a change of conduct, the Prefect wanted to know? To which Ney answered: 'It was like the breaking of a dyke before a flood.'

In the meantime the court martial was being ordered. St. Cyr, now Minister of War, nominated Moncey as President, a doubtful honour which that old soldier refused in a letter which sets him higher in the Marshalate than any of his exploits. He would not consider whether Ney was guilty or innocent, calling it 'a cruel dilemma', and warned the King against those of his circle who demanded a sacrifice. Where, he asked, were Ney's accusers when he was fighting on so many fields of battle? He reminded them of the crossing of the Beresina in 1812, when Ney had saved the wreckage of the French Army, and concluded: 'My hair grown grey under the helmet shall not become the mark of dishonour.'

For this Moncey was expelled from the Chamber of Peers, and sent to a fortress. But Jourdan, who had lost his baton retreating in Spain, accepted the Presidency of the Court, which numbered three generals and Marshals Augereau, Mortier, and Masséna. The latter deserves

*Shame*

credit for trying to wriggle out by advancing his old quarrel with Ney in Portugal, which, he claimed, would bar him from the list of impartiality. But this objection was set aside, and the first sitting opened in the great hall of the Palais de Justice on November 9th.

Ney had a rooted objection to this form of trial. He believed he had more bitter enemies among the military than in the Chamber of Peers, and that a court martial would certainly find him guilty. His standpoint was, that in view of his rank, no such tribunal was competent to judge him. He was not present at the opening, which consisted of formal readings, but his two advisers, Dupin and Berryer, followed that argument.

Next day the Marshal was summoned. Talk of rescue was in the air, and the court ways bristled with bayonets. The judges sat at a long table, facing an arm-chair which had been placed for the prisoner. He reverted to uniform for the occasion, with the Grand Cordon of the Legion of Honour. Escorted by gendarmes he passed in front of the ranks, who presented arms, and took his place after saluting. There were the usual questions as to name, abode, and profession, put by Jourdan; then Ney read his protest against the right of such a court to sit in judgment on a Marshal and Peer of the realm.

This was accentuated by his lawyers, and at four o'clock the members of the court retired to vote on the question. An hour later Jourdan announced that, by five to two, it had been decided they had no jurisdiction; and Ney, hitherto calmly indifferent, smiled at his counsel. 'Ah, Monsieur Berryer, what a service you have rendered. Those fellows would have shot me like a rabbit.'

In trusting the leniency of the Peers he differed from Davout, who thought he had more to hope for from military judgment. 'No one could condemn such a man,' said the hero of Auerstädt. He was wrong, as front-line men like Victor and Marmont were to prove.



But, generally speaking, Ney would have done better to answer his own calling.

At any rate time had been gained, and with his return to the Conciergerie, where visits were now permitted, Ney's friends were definitely hopeful. But the Royalists had other views, and in court and *salon* the talk was how to secure judgment. A few hours after the tribunal had broken up the Duke de Richelieu, President of the Council and Minister of Foreign Affairs, rose in the Chamber of Peers and moved a resolution 'in the name of Europe', for the trial of Ney by that assembly. This lent the matter an international colouring, for which extraordinary depositions would have to be tabulated with the Peers sitting as a high court of justice.

The principal hope on Ney's side was, of course, the promise of the Convention, that no act or opinion expressed during the Hundred Days should incur punishment. A legal reminder of this was sent to the Peers and Allied ambassadors, while Madame Ney made similar overtures to Wellington and the Prince Regent of England. But the faith of a treaty was nothing to set beside the determination of men who were out for blood, and the answers held that whereas the Convention applied to the acts of Allied commanders towards the French people, it nowhere bore on the rights of the King in dealing with his own subjects.

The British Government added hypocrisy to its denial of the article, by saying it could not meddle with the internal affairs of France—as though the history of the recent decades had not been largely determined by such interference!

From that moment all further mockery of a trial could have been dispensed with, and instead of judges the Prince of the Moscowa might have fronted a firing-squad. He was moved from the Conciergerie to the Luxembourg, where the hearing opened on November 21st. The great hall was crowded, mostly by foreigners, Metternich and the Prince Royal of Württemberg standing

out from a medley of officers. Chancellor Dambray was President of the Chamber, and the indictment had been drawn up by the Procureur Bellart.

Ney entered with four gendarmes. He was again in uniform, paler, as the result of imprisonment, and saluted the court before sitting. Dambray led the proceedings with a short speech, to emphasize the open minds of the assembly and requesting the 'most ample latitude' on behalf of the prisoner. Then followed the Act of Accusation, a lengthy epistle affirming that Ney, all along, had meant to play the part of a traitor by deserting to the enemy, making war on the King, and causing strife between the French people. Bellart was markedly hostile, and drew attention to the clauses of the Penal Code that treated the above crimes as capital.

After a number of protests had been read by Ney, Dupin and Berryer engaged the prosecution in legal arguments, which lasted throughout the sitting. They were repeated next day, when the defence asked for an adjournment in order to prepare new matter to meet the charges. The court broke up till December 4th and Ney, somewhat hopeful, was again lodged in the Conciergerie.

When next he appeared at the Luxembourg he referred to the right of his defenders to accept the basis of Article 12 of the Paris agreement, which had been ratified by the Treaty of Peace on November 20th. He was questioned as to the last interview with Louis, before setting off to meet Napoleon, and his threat of an iron cage was again brought into the picture. Here he was not so happy and resorted to quibbling, but in the end practically admitted the statement. Nothing, however, drove him from the assertion that he intended loyalty to the Bourbons till the morning of March 14th, and only changed when it seemed the tricolour was again sweeping the country.

The principal witnesses of his conduct in the crisis at Lons-le-Saulnier had been Generals Lecourbe (who had lately died) and de Bourmont, who was now called

for evidence. De Bourmont had a pretty record of desertion to his credit, and to such an extent that during his last declaration for the Royalists Blücher had called him a cur instead of an ally.

He affirmed that when, on March 14th, Napoleon's proclamation had been shown him, and Ney had said that the royal cause was lost so that nothing remained but to lead his troops to the Emperor, he and Lecourbe had both voiced objections. Only a wish to see what happened had led him to the parade-ground; and then came a palpable lie that brought the Marshal, who more than once had seemed on the point of interruption, springing to his feet.

Half an hour after reading the proclamation, said de Bourmont, Ney had appeared wearing the Grand Eagle of the Legion of Honour—an imputation that he had kept it ready for such a moment. 'Monsieur de Bourmont accuses me to clear his own conduct,' exclaimed the Marshal. 'It seems he prepared this denunciation of me months ago at Lille. Perhaps he flattered himself that we would not meet again face to face. . . .

'I am no orator, but now I come direct to the fact. It is unfortunate for me that General Lecourbe is no longer living; but [pointing his hand upward] I call him to witness in another place. I appeal, against these depositions, to a higher tribunal, to God Who hears us all, to God Who will judge us—you and I, Monsieur de Bourmont.' Then he turned to the President. 'Here Monsieur de Bourmont is beating me down. There we shall be judged, both of us.'

This note was wholly unexpected. And because of that no one thought of interrupting the Marshal as he continued, while a pale-faced de Bourmont looked anxiously at the Peers and lawyers as though for encouragement. 'There was I,' went on the prisoner, 'reading that fatal proclamation, while they stood opposite me with their backs to the fire-place. I called on General de Bourmont, as a man of honour, to give

his opinion. Bourmont took the proclamation, read it, said that he quite agreed, and passed it to Lecourbe.

'Lecourbe had nothing to say, and handed it back without a protest. Bourmont thought we might read the proclamation to the troops. Neither said to me, "Where are you going? You are risking your honour and reputation for a fatal cause." ' Then facing de Bourmont: 'I did not need your opinion as to the responsibility with which I alone was charged. But I was asking for light, for advice from men whom, I believed, had enough of tried affection, enough of energy, to tell me if I was wrong. Instead of that you drew me on and flung me over the precipice.'

His next words were addressed to the court. 'It was Bourmont who assembled the troops to hear the proclamation. He had two hours for reflection. If he considered my conduct criminal, why did he not arrest me? I was alone, and had not even a saddle-horse to escape with.'

These points could not be passed over, and Dambray put a direct question to the witness: 'Who gave the order for the troops to assemble?'

'It was I,' admitted de Bourmont, 'on the verbal order of the Marshal.' To which Ney added: 'He paraded them after he had been shown the proclamation.'

'How was it,' continued the President, 'that after disapproving of the Marshal's conduct, and knowing what he intended, you followed him to the parade-ground.'

De Bourmont explained that his object in doing so was to witness the attitude of the troops, which brought a query as to whether he had taken steps to incite them against the proclamation. 'There was no time,' he answered. 'I could do nothing unless I had killed the Marshal.'

'You would have done me a great service,' put in the latter, 'and perhaps it was your duty.' Then he returned to the charge as to the ready manner in which he had produced the Imperial decoration. 'Do you take me for

a miserable wretch?' he asked de Bourmont. 'You mean to imply that I brought it from Paris with the set purpose of betraying the King. I am angry at an intelligent man using such base and false methods against me. You must be in a strange condition of mind to testify to such theories.'

It was going none too well with the prosecution. Ney had impressed his audience, while de Bourmont was plainly agitated. Bellart, too, was uneasy, and wanted to know if some personal quarrel existed between Ney and the witness. 'None whatever,' the Marshal assured him.

At this stage Berryer rose, and fronted de Bourmont for the first time. On what motive, the counsel asked, did he attend the banquet given by Ney at Lons-le-Saulnier? To guard against being suspected, or even arrested, the general told him—which called forth another outburst from the prisoner: 'I arrested no one. All were free, and neither you nor any one else objected. You held an important command and could have had me arrested, which would have been well. The officers of rank came to dine with me. I was dull enough, but if Monsieur de Bourmont is truthful he will tell you that the party was a gay one.'

How many men, asked the President, were behind Napoleon at Lyons on the eve of Ney's defection? De Bourmont gave the number of 5,000, which Ney contradicted. 'Every one knows he had 14,000, without counting those who were coming in from all sides and a crowd of half-pay officers. Then I saw that civil war was inevitable, and that one would have to march over 60,000 French corpses.'

Touching the effect of the proclamation upon the troops, Bourmont admitted it was greeted with cries of 'Vive l'Empereur!' At that Berryer turned to Dambray with the request: 'Will the President ask Monsieur de Bourmont whether he cried "Vive l'Roi"?' This question was objected to by the Peers, one saying it was quite uncalled for while another protested against the use of

personalities. Bellart followed up with a condemnation of such irrelevant details, and de Bourmont, now thoroughly discomfited, was allowed to retire.

Then came an account of the happenings written by Lecourbe, shortly before his death, which bore out the various aspects of the defence. According to this the troops, influenced by events at Lyons and by news of the widespread desertions, would have abandoned the royal cause even though they had never heard the proclamation. This statement of Lecourbe's, in common with a number of civilian and army witnesses, also affirmed that Ney's declaration on behalf of Bonaparte had not been opposed, and that till the fatal 14th of March he was zealous for the Bourbons.

Another witness, the Prefect of the Jura, supported de Bourmont's statement that Ney had appeared that day wearing the decoration. 'You did not see me rightly, sir,' the Marshal told him.

When the court closed he was taken to an improvised prison in another part of the Luxembourg. His room, the corridors, and outside garden were watched by soldiers who in spite of wearing the uniform of the National Guard were young Royalists, for the most part, who had volunteered for the duty. Ney was in cheerful spirits and sat for some time, after a good dinner, talking with his counsel.

Early on the 5th a number of witnesses, who had heard Ney's irresponsible outbursts against the Royal Family during the Hundred Days, spoke for the prosecution. The time referred to was that of his northern tour of inspection, after Napoleon's return to Paris. This, of course, had no direct bearing upon the points of the trial, and was merely designed to colour opinion against the prisoner. But the effect was countered by more evidence that until the time of reading the proclamation he had stood for the throne, and even denounced Bonaparte in the process.

Then came his jeweller, who was able to prove that

the Imperial decorations had not been returned to the Marshal till after Napoleon had entered Paris, which negatived the idea of his having kept them ready for an opportune moment. This was important, but still more favourable testimony was promised by the calling of Marshal Davout, on whose instructions the terms of capitulation, including Article 12, had been accepted.

He explained his preparations for resisting the Allies (85,000 troops and 'all the hopes of success which a general can have who commands Frenchmen'), on the night between the 2nd and 3rd July; how, before battle developed, the Provisional Government had sent him a draft of the Convention, to which he added the terms relating to the safety of persons and property; last, his word to the envoys, who were to sign it, that negotiations must cease if the articles were not accepted.

Then came the vital question, put by Berryer: How had he (Marshal Davout) and the Provisional Government interpreted Article 12? Upon that the future of the trial depended. For had Davout insisted that the French only laid down their arms on condition of the amnesty being granted, the prosecution would have had no more to go on than a wilful repudiation of that promise. But the court, whose attitude was already fixed, could not allow the defence such a capital advantage, and Bellart asked that the question put to the witness be ruled out.

It was no use Berryer protesting. Dambray announced that Article 12 must be interpreted according to its terms, regardless of the meaning attached by those who embodied it in the Convention. This ruling was answered by Ney, who said he had trusted upon the protection afforded by the agreement. 'Otherwise, do you not see that I would rather have died fighting? I was arrested in contradiction to that capitulation. It was only because I put faith in it that I stayed in France.'

A brief but similar account of the condition on which terms were accepted was given by the envoys who, instructed by Davout, had put their signatures to the

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agreement. It was thus made doubly clear that failing exemption for all persons, whatever their acts or opinion during the Hundred Days, the French Army would still have resisted. Once that pledge of immunity had been granted (and it called forth no objection at the time) negotiations went forward, *but only upon the basis of general pardon.*

At this stage Bellart rose to make his speech for the prosecution. Vehement, and wholly opposed to a clement outlook, he typified the fear and resentment inspired by a Revolutionary reminder in those who had stood apart from its working. When called on to reply, Dupin and Berryer asked for another adjournment, which was granted.

The court met for its final session on December 6th. In the meantime a step had been taken to invalidate Ney's defence in so far as it was covered by the Convention of Paris. This fact was deadly to the prosecution, so a simple expedient was adopted on the lines of the travesty that went by the name of justice under the Terror. With the consent of the President the treaty was declared to be outside the scope of the Chamber, so that no further appeal to the meaning of Article 12 would be admitted.

The defence, opened by Berryer, was thus reduced to a mere formality. It reminded the court that the Marshal had taken a foremost part in Napoleon's abdication; of his consternation at the news of the return from Elba, and how his stand for the throne had been made impossible by the widespread enthusiasm for Bonaparte, and the collapse of the Royalists. Ney was no politician but a soldier, thoughtful for his country, who had witnessed the rise and fall of many Governments, and seen in every change the will of the people. So it was that the flight of the King, and the fall of Lyons, had made it appear that France was again declaring for the Empire.

From that Berryer passed to the arrival of the Allies in Paris. He was referring to their acts as being part of



a common assent to which the King was a party when Bellart, anticipating his argument, protested against the pleading of the Convention. Dupin interposed with a reminder that Saarlouis, where Ney had been born, was no longer part of France. But the accused would not sanction this. 'I was born a Frenchman, and will die a Frenchman,' he told them.

He went on to emphasize the futility of all further proceedings. 'So far my defence has appeared to be free, but now, it seems, it must be fettered. I thank my generous defenders for all they have done, and for what they are still ready to do. But I beg them to stop defending me altogether, rather than do so imperfectly. I would rather have no defence than a sham one. I am accused in defiance of the faith of treaties, to which I am forbidden to appeal. . . . I appeal from you to Europe and to posterity.'

He turned to Berryer, who was still standing. 'You can see very well it has all been settled in advance.' Dambray invited the defence to continue providing they restricted themselves to the 'facts of the case', which meant, of course, leaving out the principal fact entirely. And once more Ney addressed his counsel: 'I forbid you to speak unless you are allowed to speak freely.'

Bellart closed his case by remarking that since Ney had cut short the discussion, it only remained to demand the enforcement of the Penal Code in regard to treason and attacks on the State. The accused informed them he had nothing to say against the application of the penalty. And with that the court was cleared of all but members of the Chamber. It was five o'clock in the afternoon. Wintry darkness had closed down over the city, and lamps were burning in the great hall of the Luxembourg as the Peers voted.

The count was taken on three questions: Did Marshal Ney receive certain agents on the night between the 13th and 14th of March? Did he, on March 14th, read a proclamation at Lons-le-Saulnier encouraging the troops

to defection? And lastly, Has he been guilty of an attempt against the safety of the State?

On the first question, 111 voted 'Yes' and 47 'No'. Three of the Peers made a protest on this point against the ruling out of the Convention of Paris as evidence. The second question received 158 votes in the affirmative, and 3 in the negative. While on the third 157 voted 'Yes' (one of these adding that the case was covered by the Convention), to a single 'No'.

Marshal Ney was thus declared guilty by an overwhelming majority of the Peers, and now came the question of sentence. In case of second thoughts two votes were taken, and on the first 142 favoured death by military execution, 13 were for deportation, while the spirit of vindictiveness was so strong in one of the Peers that he voted the guillotine.

The second decision found 137 for death, 17 for deportation, and 5 suggestions for an appeal to the King instead of voting. Among those who decreed the extreme penalty on both occasions were the elder Kellermann, Duke of Valmy; Marmont, the gunner-general of '96; and Victor, who had stood with Ney in the gallant rear-guard action at the Beresina when between them, over the bridges, had passed the broken shadow of the Grand Army.

It was near midnight. Ney's lawyers were summoned, but never doubting the judgment they had already left to say good-bye to the prisoner. They found him in cheerful spirits, eating well ('I am sure that Monsieur Bellart will not dine with as good an appetite,' he told them), but under no illusion as to the sentence. It even devolved on him to comfort Berryer with an assurance that they would meet elsewhere. Then he prepared the last instructions for his notary and went over his papers, tearing some and giving the pieces to the blazing fire.

Back in the great hall, with its empty tribunes, the Peers were signing the verdict. Snatching a mouthful of soup or wine from a buffet in the corridor they moved,

in pale and sleepy procession, to fill the document, a lengthy process that lasted out the chime of two on the morning of the 7th. Plans were already drawn up for a speedy execution. And sure of vengeance the Royalists dwindled home, a shine of wheels under the wan street lamps marking their dispersal through the city.

Those hours of darkness were bitterly cold. Snow fell, mantling the boulevards. The latest carriage had gone and the last idler turned away from the Luxembourg, speculating as to the window of the temporary prison. It was in one of the upper stories, with the light of a log fire playing over the walls and four sentries watching the Marshal. He had flung himself, still dressed, upon the bed, and was soon sleeping as soundly as he had on a thicker snowfield than that which piled in the palace gardens.

What a past, what blaze of glory was spending itself, even as the warm shade of the room or the drifting snowflakes. The thought of Russia had kindled memories. There had been the cooperage at Saarlouis, the stool in the lawyer's office, the mines and furnace at Saleck; the road to Metz, and the first time he had shaken spur as a hussar; the splendid drive of the Sambre-et-Meuse, from Fleurus to the Rhine, and the German girl he had kissed and taken to billet; the night-storm and attack at Hohenlinden, under the pines; his dash across the Danube at Elchingen, in full dress and tunic blazing with decorations; the mad charge through the foggy morning at Jena; his old 6th Corps bursting into the ruins of Friedland; and Borodino where he had dared the bullets to strike him between the whiles of leading the van with Murat and Davout.

What men, what almost legends of the bayonet! There had been Moscow, the retreat that not all the Cossacks of Platoff and sixty-six degrees of frost could turn into a rout. But always, standing in relief from his own world of alarms and frozen bivouacs, there had been Aglaé, as when they had walked together under the foliage of

the chapel roof at Grignon, her dark hair catching the glow from the chandeliers.

What life, what golden life had been promised them by the fortune-teller, a future which had only seemed to live in the few short days at La Petite Malgrange! There had been the last time he had drawn his sword, never to replace it, the advance up the slope at the head of the Imperial Guard, and the moonlit way to Genappe. . . . All ended!

*We will live upon the past. . . .*

Years had gone in the telling, more years than the soldiers of the Empire had stopped to remember. They had lived in a swirl of action, apart from time, but now such things as a brand falling from the fire, or the silent intentness of his watchers, could conjure distance. The Revolution, from which he had gained his birthright, was becoming a memory. Let him dream back for a moment. He was forty-six, and had been a soldier for upwards of twenty-seven years. It was twenty-two years since the Terror, the year after the cannonade which had shaken Valmy and so Europe, which none but the old soldier remembered nowadays. It was twenty-six years since the States-General had met to govern, and a full thirty since Second-lieutenant Bonaparte had walked the dew with Catherine de Colombier, when dawn broke over the cherry-trees at Basseau.

France was changing. The fire dropped low in the grate. And the four sentries kept vigil over the sleeper.

Elsewhere in Paris there were people who still danced or took a hand at the card-tables. Soon after midnight the result of the trial reached them, putting an end to the music while the games were unfinished, but not all from the same motive. Here and there a returned emigrant was pleased at the news, though it was dangerous for any, apart from the women, to show it. For a chair was likely to be pushed back and a challenge hurled by one of the veterans within hearing. Some thought wildly of rescue. Weapons were handy. Where was it

likely to be? The Plain of Grenelle, where Colonel Labédoyère had bitten the dust already. There was angry talk and smarting of old wounds that night in the capital.

Aglaé had waited up for the news to reach her. When it came she roused the four boys and together with her sister, Madame Gamot, they drove to the Luxembourg. But admission could not be had till morning, so the whole party remained in the carriage. The children fell asleep while the women gazed at the lights in the palace windows, the only sound being that of the troops and gendarmes patrolling the gardens.

At three o'clock the secretary of the Chamber of Peers called on the prisoner. 'I have a very painful duty,' he began. 'Well,' Ney answered, 'we must all do our duty. What is it?' Producing a paper the secretary started to read. 'Get to the point,' Ney told him. 'Don't bother with these formalities.' The official went on to the law whereby any attempt to change the succession to the throne was punishable by death; which law, Ney reminded, had first been decreed for the maintenance of the Bonaparte family. Once more he prompted: 'Come to the finish.' And then, after hearing sentence: 'They might have said that Michel Ney, once a French soldier, will soon be a heap of dust.'

He was told the decisive hour was to be nine o'clock on that morning of December 7th. 'When they wish. I am ready.' He asked de Montigny, governor of the Luxembourg, to admit his wife at seven, not knowing, of course, she was even now outside the palace. But he gave no time for the Abbé de St. Pierre, Curé of St. Sulpice, who was also in attendance; and noting this it was suggested he might prefer some other confessor. Ney, however, was merely impatient. 'You are worrying me with the priests. I shall appear before God as I have always appeared before men—fearless.'

He arranged, before his wife came, to see the notary. 'But as for the priest,' he added, 'don't trouble me about

him.' One of the guards had been listening and now stepped forward, with his hand at salute: 'You are wrong, Marshal. I am not as brave as you, but [displaying his chevrons] I am as old in the service. And I have never gone under fire so boldly as when I had' first of all commended my soul to God.'

Ney was impressed, and answered the veteran in a changed tone: 'You are right, my friend. That is good advice you have given me.' He promised to see the Abbé after his wife. It was then four in the morning and Ney slept for another two hours, rising at six for a final call from his notary. Instead of uniform he was wearing a dark blue coat, black knee-breeches, silk stockings, and a white cravat.<sup>1</sup> Half an hour later the guards were ordered to leave, and de Montigny entered with Aglaé and the children.

Once in the room Aglaé, whose strain had just been followed by that broken night in the carriage, fainted and would have fallen but for de Montigny, who caught her and placed her in the Marshal's arms before leaving. She soon recovered, to hear the Marshal telling the children (the eldest of whom was twelve) that perhaps he was leaving them an honoured name which she, their mother, would teach them to make more worthy. Woman-like, she could not believe the sentence was irrevocable, and still spoke of another appeal to Louis. For the sake of comfort Ney pretended to be in agreement; and as they left, the elder boys with bent heads, he could hear the youngest, a child of three, adding his wail to the cue of his mother's sorrow.

Then came the Abbé, a typical soldier's priest who had said Mass during the Terror, and even followed the tumbrils to execution. He was a good hour with Ney, and promised to come back for the final journey. All this while troops were parading in the palace court. General Count Victor de Rochechouart had charge of the proceedings, while Major de St. Bias commanded the

<sup>1</sup> See Note 4.

firing-squad of twelve veteran non-commissioned officers, from the Luxembourg guard.

At half-past eight a closed carriage was summoned from the neighbouring boulevard. Two rows of soldiers, with fixed bayonets, formed up on either side of the vehicle. And when all was ready the Abbé de St. Pierre opened the prisoner's door for the last time. Ney met him, smiling. 'Ah, Monsieur le Curé, I understand. I am ready.' Out in the corridor he shook hands with de Montigny and passed down, with his escort of two lieutenants, into the courtyard.

There was a moment's pause as he took in the weather, rain drizzling from heavy clouds. 'It's a wretched day,' he remarked. The Abbé made as though to enter the carriage behind him, but was answered by another smile, and: 'Get in, Monsieur le Curé. I shall be going before you presently.' De Rochechouart gave the order to march, and the procession moved out of the courtyard. Passing southward across the garden, it entered the Avenue de l'Observatoire, at the end of which was an open space flanked by a dead wall.

'What, arrived already?' asked Ney, as the carriage halted. There were few people inside the railings at that hour, and some of the troops hurried to block the openings from near-by thoroughfares. The rest formed in three sides about the wall, in front of which the Marshal bowed his head to receive absolution. He handed the priest a gold snuff-box as a keepsake for Madame Ney, and then his purse, containing a few gold louis, for the poor of St. Sulpice. After embracing him the Abbé knelt, while the firing-squad marched into the square and loaded.

St. Bias approached with the idea of bandaging the prisoner's eyes, but Ney repulsed him. 'Don't you know, sir, that a soldier does not fear death?' As the major walked back to his party and the muskets were levelled, Ney took off his hat and advanced four paces, exclaiming in a loud voice: 'Frenchmen, I protest against my condemnation. My honour—'

There was the word 'Fire!' . . . a crashing volley . . . the priest raised his hand in benediction . . . and Marshal Ney, Prince of the Moscowa and Duke of Elchingen, was face down on the muddy ground, with a hat rolling away to near his feet.

The drums spoke. Some of the onlookers joined in a shout of 'Vive le Roi!' The troops marched off, leaving only a few gendarmes on the scene; and de Rochechouart turned to one who had stood near him:

'That, my friend, was a great lesson in how to die well.'



## CHAPTER XIII THE RECALL

THE hour of nine found Aglaé waiting in an ante-room of the Tuileries. She had arrived there before Louis was up and sent her name to the Chamberlain. Ignorant as to the time of execution she would have gone on waiting, had not some one informed her: 'The audience you have requested with the King would now be useless.' No more. The Bourbons could yet be tactful.

Strange scenes were being enacted in the Place de l'Observatoire. Ney's body was left where it had fallen with the Abbé, still kneeling beside it, surrounded by onlookers. Some were glad, others despondent. But the priest thought more of his prayers for the dead man than the attitude of the living.

The crowd numbered a few horsemen, among them a Russian general. When it was known he had gone to witness the shooting the Tsar, with more sensibility than he had shown in repudiating the Convention, gave orders for his name to be struck from the roll of the army.

Another trotted his horse across the ground and leaped it over the fallen body. Story has it that the rider was an Englishman. He was quite safe in perpetrating the insult, for eleven bullets had found their mark in the chest, head, neck, and right arm of the Marshal. But the twelfth was embedded in the wall, high up from the target, where the sight of one of the firing-squad had been diverted by sentiment.

There was a further act on the part of an old soldier to be recorded. One came from the crowd and dipped

his handkerchief in a pool of the blood, carrying it away as a relic. He, like the kneeling Abbé, was a free man in that circle of curiosity.

At last they came with a stretcher, and an escort of guardsmen, to take the body to a neighbouring hospital. A hall of the building was set apart, and the nuns who served there covered the bed with flowers and ranged it with candles. Night and day some of them prayed beside it, while hundreds of Parisians passed through in silent homage to one who had carried his baton to the peak of the Marshalate.

The 7th witnessed another gathering on the Plain of Grenelle. Here, it was generally believed, the execution would take place. Standing apart from the crowd were a number of men who were wearing greatcoats, not only because it was a winter morning, but to conceal weapons. These were the rescue-party, half-pay officers and veterans of the tricolour. The oldest among them had swarmed over the Alps in the flawless days of Lodi and Marengo; the youngest had seen the agony of the Bearskins at Waterloo.

Presently, it was learnt, they had been cheated. Marshal Ney was dead in the Luxembourg. The Empire had sounded its last rally, and they were missing. So they returned again to their cheerless rooms and café table, to grow old, dreaming, or waxing garrulous over a past that was dead as glory.

Next day a hearse wended the streets of Paris to the cemetery of Père-la-Chaise. It attracted no attention beyond the ordinary, and only a few people were present at the graveside when the Abbé de St. Pierre read the burial service. The spot was on the eastern side of

the cemetery where two paths cross, and where a stone bearing the single word 'Ney' was afterwards erected.

Davout, Masséna, Lefèbvre, Pérignon, and Sérurier are buried near him.

The old barrel-cooper, Pierre Ney, was still living in Saarlouis. He was strong beyond the usual for his increasing years, but those who knew him best decided, in view of his attachment to Michel, that the tragedy of the Luxembourg should never be told him. He accepted the silence, fearful of a meaning he dared not learn, and trying to cloud all sense of the period when his daughter Marguerite and her family had appeared in mourning.

An ageing woman was learning the details of that epic year, 1812, for the first time. How the Prince of the Moscowa, almost alone of the multifarious Grand Army, had kept his face to the cold and the Cossacks, firing the last musket on the bridge of Kovno, flinging the last of the abandoned arms into the Niemen, and being the last man to quit the soil of that awful venture.

Hearing these things she regretted the White Terror, which had paid such services to France with a rain of bullets.

That woman was the Duchess of Angoulême, who had sometime insulted the Neys in the pride and vigour of her power.

At St. Helena, Napoleon said of Ney: 'He was precious on the battlefield,' while adding: 'In the heat of the action he would forget any troops which were not actually under his eyes.' He was undisturbed by news of the execution. For the fact that once in his life the

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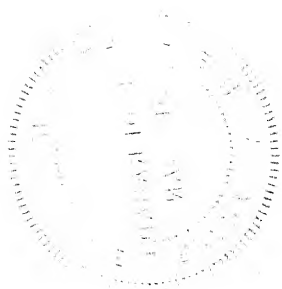
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STATUE OF MARSHAL NEY, BY RUDE, IN THE CARREFOUR DE  
L'OBSERVATOIRE, CLOSE TO WHERE HE WAS EXECUTED



Marshal was known to waver rankled in the mind of one who was so sure of destiny as to have no storms in his own conscience, and who rated fidelity as the touchstone of all the virtues.

In 1830 the Bourbon dynasty tottered for the last time, and was replaced, in the person of Louis Philippe, by the House of Orleans. It was a temporary measure. Public opinion was being changed by the spreading of Liberalism, and the new tide of national sentiment discovered it had more in common with the ideals of the Empire than with the present monarchy.

There was some expression of this in December 1840, when Napoleon's body was restored to France and buried under the dome of the Invalides. Eight years later the Orleanists went the way of the Bourbons, and Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, the great soldier's nephew, was made President of the Republic. He afterwards dropped that title to ascend the Imperial throne as Emperor of the French, while the people still looked back for a trace of the Eagles.

It was the 7th of December 1853. The name of Michel Ney had been restored to the roll of the Legion of Honour, and his trial and sentence were declared illegal. It was generally recognized that the Royalists, in their zeal for vengeance, had acted in defiance of a solemn treaty; and now, on the thirty-eighth anniversary of his execution, a statue was being unveiled to the great Marshal, near the spot where St. Bias's command had cut him short on the word 'honour'.

Marshal St. Arnaud, Minister of War, was surrounded by officers of State, the Army, and of the Navy. The Archbishop of Paris stood with his clergy. Troops were drawn up in the form of a great square, enclosing the ceremony, with guns unlimbered under the bare branches

of the Luxembourg Gardens. In front of the monument stood a little group of civilians, the surviving friends and relatives of Ney, a deputation of people from Saarlouis (to strike a note of the coöperage), and Dupin with the younger Berryer, recalling the trial.

There was a short religious rite, after which St. Arnaud spoke of Ney's great services to his country, the internal discords from which had arisen his passing weakness, a weakness that must finally be lost in the all-encompassing glories of his career. The veil dropped, and to a salute of guns and music the statue was revealed while the troops marched past with a flourish of sword and colour.

There were two bases of attention; the monument, and a little grey-haired old woman who was there with her three soldier sons; General Joseph Napoleon Ney, General Michel Ney, and Colonel Edgar Ney. The bands rose to a crescendo. The fling feet might have been marking another of those pirouettes which had startled Europe, or going into position at Jena or on the plain of Friedland. But now they were sounding in reparation, an act that was hardly as real in her estimate (for such is the perversity of time) as the days when, as Mademoiselle Aglaé, she had queened it in Joséphine's train at Malmaison, with its long June of bird-songs and scent of roses, its shady gateway and walks set with beds of tulip and hyacinth where, under the eyes of marble gods and to the echo of church bells from over the fields at Reuil, she had pondered the suit of a certain cavalry general and found him wanting.

Now, with their three sons to witness, she was holding a place of honour on that day of atonement. But how grey it had found her! And the wild garden odour was vanished, the cascade silent, the marble gods were cracked and weatherbeaten, and Joséphine, too, had died, died in her careful billow of pretty ribbons and rose satin, in that same year of Napoleon's abdication and the storm which had blinded the Marshal.

How soon the present became a memory, how confusing it was to remember. That summer of the Consulate, Lieutenant-General of the King, and 'They cannot know what the name of Ney stands for!'

*We will live upon the past. There is enough of that to satisfy us.*

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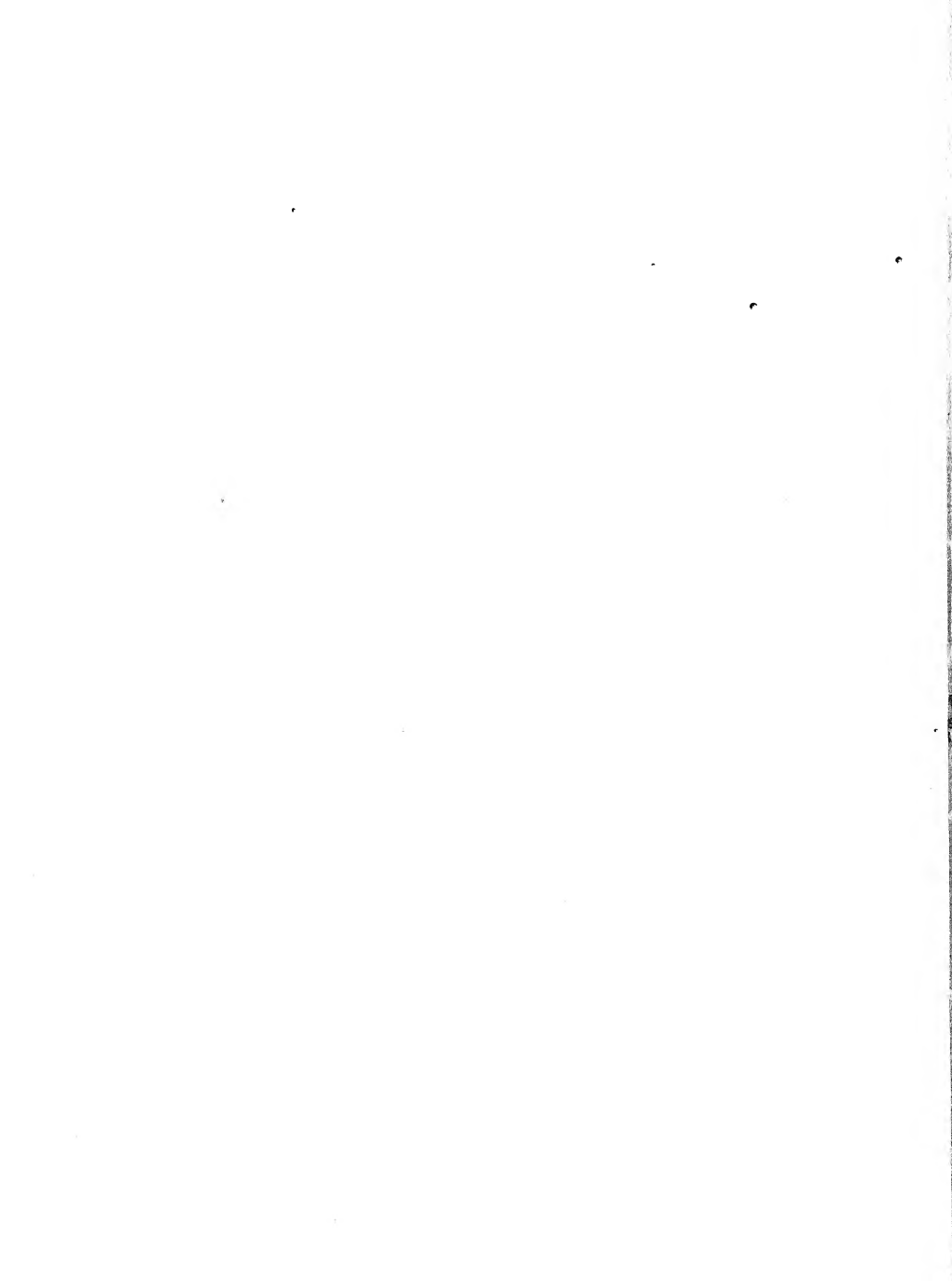




## NOTES

1. The semaphore system was much improved during Napoleon's time. The main drawback was always the sudden descending of fog, by which a message was liable to be interrupted before its end.
2. The changing sentiments of the time were well expressed in the following skit:

'What news? *Ma foi!*  
The Tiger has broken out of his den.  
The Monster was three days at sea.  
The Wretch has landed at Fréjus.  
The Brigand has arrived at Antibes.  
The Invader has reached Grenoble.  
The General has entered Lyons.  
Napoleon slept last night at Fontainebleau.  
The Emperor proceeds to the Tuileries to-day.  
His Imperial Majesty will address his loyal subjects  
to-morrow.'
3. The 52nd Foot, to be known later, under the county organization, as the 2nd Battalion Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry.
4. De Rochechouart was greatly relieved when he saw how Ney was dressed for the last journey. He wrote in his *Memoirs*: 'I was afraid that he might have been in uniform, and that, consequently, it would be necessary to have it "disgraced", and to have torn off the buttons, epaulettes, and decorations.'



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